

# STALIN'S GOLDEN BOY?

## Sergei Kirov's Political Profile, 1926 to 1934

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

**Master of Arts**

at

**The Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History, IAKH**

**The University of Oslo**

by

**MARIA DIKOVA**

May 2010



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## **ABSTRACT**

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Sergei Mironovich Kirov, a close associate of Joseph Stalin and Leningrad Party Chief in the period between 1926 and 1934 was shot to death in his headquarters in Leningrad on 1 December 1934. Before the opening of the Soviet archives in the early 1990s, there was a prevailing theory that Stalin was in some way involved in the assassination of Kirov. It was suggested that Kirov was eliminated on Stalin's order as a potential political rival. There were prevalent assumptions among scholars and the public that, in cooperation with other regional secretaries, Kirov advanced an independent set of reforms aimed at relaxation of policies and reconciliation with Stalin's former rivals. Sergei Kirov was repeatedly portrayed as an independent politician who, despite his close relationship with Stalin, could oppose him on central political issues.

This Master of Arts dissertation is aimed at examining the question of whether Kirov's political vision of the Soviet central policies was in any way different from the political programme advanced by Stalin and the rest of his inner circle in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It also seeks to discuss whether Kirov was in any way more liberal in his treatment of various oppositional groups, and whether he faithfully supported the implementation of Stalin's policies in the Leningrad region, which was under Kirov's authority. The main approach to studying the research question is biographical. Due to the chosen genre of writing, the dissertation is structured chronologically as well as thematically. The discussion is primarily limited to the assessment of domestic policies. It has been decided to concentrate mainly on such issues as economic planning and the fate of oppositionists because these matters were central in the Party debates in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

This research has been principally based on the examination of the accessible archival documentation preserved in the Russian State Archive for Social and Political History, RGASPI, in Moscow. It includes documentations from personal archives of Kirov and Stalin, and the archive of the Politburo, or policy-making body of the Soviet Union.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*Russia is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.*

Winston Churchill

I have greatly benefited from comments, support and advice from different people at various stages of my work. My first thanks are due to my supervisor, Professor Åsmund Egge, at the University of Oslo. I am grateful to him for suggesting write about this topic for my dissertation. His profound knowledge of the Soviet Communist Party history has provided me with a unique source of academic supervision. I am thankful for his advice, comments and assistance in the course of two years. I also wish to express my special gratitude to my other supervisor, Professor Iver B. Neumann, at the Russia Studies department at the University of Oslo. Thank you for encouragement and valuable guidance along the way. It was always a pleasure and motivating to talk about the Soviet Party history and Stalin at the SV cafeteria. I also thank the Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History at the University of Oslo for financial assistance during my four stays in Moscow for researching the archives. I am appreciative of all the help from librarians at the RGASPI archive, the State Public History Library in Moscow and the University Library in Oslo.

My friends, Olga and Julia, should be thanked for letting me stay with them during my research in Moscow. I would not have been able to complete this research without encouragement and support from my incredible classmates Christine, Mari, Maren and Hilde. They have been amazing friends throughout the entire process. We have suffered our ups and downs together and their support has meant a lot to me. A special thank you goes to my dear friend, Cristine Delaney, who always manages to find the right words to encourage me.

Finally, I would like to thank my loving parents, sister, niece Dasha, and my dear fiancé Stig Arne for patience, care and concern. Most of all, I am grateful to them for believing in me along the way. Thank you for all your contributions.

Oslo 2010, Maria Dikova

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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**ABSTRACT**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION**

**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION** **1**

**MYSTERIES AROUND KIROV’S LIFE AND DEATH**

- Kirov’s Line and its Origins 1
- Literature Review 3
- Primary Sources 6
- Speeches and Interpretation 10
- Writing a Biography 11
- Focus of the Research and Structure 13

**CHAPTER 2: BECOMING A BOLSHEVIK** **15**

**SERGEI KIROV’S POLITICAL CAREER BEFORE 1926**

- Introduction 15
- Political Awakenings 15
- A Revolutionary or a Journalist? 17
- Deviations from Bolshevism 19
- Establishment of the Soviet Power 21
- Political Intrigues 22
- Conclusion 23

**CHAPTER 3: LENINGRAD PARTY CHIEF** **25**

**SERGEI KIROV AND THE OPPOSITION IN LENINGRAD,  
1926 TO 1928**

- Introduction 25
- Moscow versus Leningrad 25
- Leningrad - “the Cradle of the Revolution” 27

• Crashing the Leningrad Opposition	28
• Stalin's Choice	30
• Transfer to Leningrad	31
• Kirov and the United Opposition	32
• Conclusion	36
<b>CHAPTER 4: STALIN'S REVOLUTION FROM ABOVE</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>THE RIGHT DEVIATION, INDUSTRIALISATION AND COLLECTIVISATION</b>	
• Introduction	38
• New Policies, New Factional Struggles	38
• Kirov, a Waverer?	39
• <i>Pravda</i> about Leningrad	43
• Industrialisation Plan	47
• Views on Collectivisation	49
• Conclusion	56
<b>CHAPTER 5: STALIN'S FRIEND OR FOE?</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>SERGEI KIROV: LEADER OF A "MODERATE" COURSE?</b>	
• Introduction	58
• The Riutin Affair	58
• Stalin and Other Cases of Opposition	63
• Kirov on Oppositionists	67
• Kirov's Political Outlook in the Early 1930s	69
• The Seventeenth Party Congress	75
• The Question of Stalin's Replacement	78
• The Question of the CC Elections	80
• Transfer to Moscow	82
• Kirov and Stalin in the 1930s	84
• Conclusion	85

<b>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>SERGEI KIROV: A FIRM ASSOCIATE OF STALIN?</b>	
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY:</b>	<b>92</b>
• Archives	92
• Newspapers and Magazines	92
• Secondary Literature	93
• Internet Links	98
• Illustrations	99

## A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The transliterations from Russian to English in this dissertation will be based on a simplified version of the Romanisation of Russian presented by the US Library of Congress<sup>1</sup>, LOC.

Cyrillic Alphabet	LOC Romanisation	Thesis Romanisation
А	A	A
Б	B	B
В	V	V
Г	G	G
Д	D	D
Е	E	E /Ye (initial position)
Ё	Ё	Yo
Ж	ZH	ZH
З	Z	Z
И	I	I
Й	I	I
К	K	K
Л	L	L
М	M	M
Н	N	N
О	O	O
П	P	P
Р	R	R
С	S	S
Т	T	T
У	U	U
Ф	F	F
Х	KH	KH
Ц	TS	TS
Ч	CH	CH
Ш	SH	SH
Щ	SHCH	SHCH
Ъ	''	<i>omitted</i>
Ы	Y	Y
Ь	‘	<i>omitted</i>
Э	E	E
Ю	IU	iu/Yu (initial position)
Я	IA	ia/Ya (initial position)
* ИЙ final position	II	Y
* ИЯ final position	IIA	IA
* НЫЙ final position	NYI	NY

- \* Notes on transliteration were partially borrowed from John Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov in *The Road to Terror*.<sup>2</sup>

By and large, proper Russian names were directly transcribed from their Russian versions. For example, *Александр* will be transcribed as Aleksandr rather than Anglicised Alexander.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/romanization/russian.pdf> (visited 29.01.2009, 14.47 local time).

<sup>2</sup> J. Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov *The Road to Terror*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), xix.



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### MYSTERIES AROUND KIROV'S LIFE AND DEATH

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On 1 December 1934 Sergei Mironovich Kirov, the chief secretary of the Leningrad Communist Party Committee in the Soviet Union, was shot to death in his headquarters in Leningrad, known today as St. Petersburg. Kirov was one of the most well-liked Communist Party leaders, a close associate and a good friend of Joseph Stalin. Labelled as one of the greatest mysteries in the Soviet Union history, scholars and the public alike have been debating the underlying motives behind Kirov's assassination. Among the theories questioning Kirov's death was a prevalent assumption before the 1990s that he represented a political threat to Stalin's leadership. Kirov, in cooperation with other provincial secretaries of the Soviet Communist Party, allegedly advanced an independent political course aimed at the relaxation of Stalin's harsh policies of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Stalin was presumably felt threatened by Kirov's independent position and growing popularity within the Soviet leadership as well as the Soviet masses and therefore wished to eliminate a political rival for power.

While some perceived Kirov as a charismatic leader of a "moderate" course, which the Soviet Communist Party officially pursued in 1933, others insisted that Kirov was Stalin's golden boy: his unconditional follower and an advocate of Stalin's oppressive policies. The overall aim of this research is to analyse whether Sergei Kirov actually advocated his own independent set of reforms in opposition to Stalin's programme, whether he adhered to a group of more moderated minded party members, if there was one, and whether he represented a political alternative to Stalin for Party's supreme leadership.

### KIROV'S LINE AND ITS ORIGINS

Doubts about Kirov's unconditional support to Stalin were initiated by the foreign press as early as the middle of the 1930s. Boris Nicolaevsky, a prominent Menshevik in exile in Paris wrote an article entitled 'Letter of an Old Bolshevik', which he published anonymously in two parts in the *Socialist Herald* at the end of 1936 and in January 1937. In the article Kirov was exposed as an initiator of a "new line" of moderation and abolition of the administrative pressure, which was pursued under Stalin's leadership in the late 1920s.<sup>3</sup> Nicolaevsky drew

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<sup>3</sup> Boris Nicolaevsky, "The Letter of an Old Bolshevik". In ed. J.D. Zagoria, *Power and the Soviet Elite: The Letter of an Old Bolshevik and Other Essays*. (London: Pall Mall Press, 1966), 32.

his conclusions on the basis of Kirov's allegedly ambivalent relation towards Stalin's policies. It was claimed that the implementation of Stalin's policies proceeded slower in the Leningrad region, which was under the authority of Kirov, in comparison with other regions in the Soviet Union. Unlike Stalin, Kirov was perceived as more liberal in his treatment of oppositionists. Supposedly, he had successfully opposed Stalin in the question of the execution of the oppositionist Martemian Riutin in September 1932. Kirov's involvement in the Riutin affair, as it was called later, was adopted by scholars as a central proof of his opposition to Stalin. On the other hand, Nicolaevsky did not seem to question Kirov's loyalty to the centrally determined Soviet policies, general line. He noted that Kirov was a "one hundred percent supporter of the general line."<sup>4</sup> Nicolaevsky in later years admitted that he acquired his information about Kirov from informal conversations with Nikolai Bukharin, Stalin's rival in the late 1920s. The limitations of the Nicolaevsky's articles as a historical source will be discussed in Chapter 5 of the thesis.

Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin's successor, politically deployed Kirov's death in his de-Stalinisation campaign in the late 1950s. In his speech at the Twentieth Party Congress, held in February 1956, Khrushchev indirectly suggested that Stalin could have been involved in Kirov's death. Thoughts about Kirov's moderate position and Stalin's participation in Kirov's death were further expressed in the memoirs of Old Bolsheviks, Bolsheviks before the October Revolution of 1917, and the émigrés and defectors from the Soviet Union. Those accounts inclined towards the idea that Kirov represented a political threat to Stalin due to his popular and independent position in the party.<sup>5</sup> As a result they added even more obscurity to the Kirov's political reputation.

Kirov's line has been characterised as "soft Stalinism".<sup>6</sup> It should be noted, however, that "moderate" domestic policies have been generally associated with the position of Nikolai Bukharin, who favoured a gradual transition to socialism in cooperation between the peasantry and the working class. Nonetheless, Kirov's so-called "moderate" position in the party was not Bukharinist in its nature. Stalin's policies of collectivisation and industrialisation provided presumably the core of Kirov's vision. However, he seemed to advocate slower tempos for implementation of Stalin's policies. Therefore it is not

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<sup>4</sup> Boris Nicolaevsky, "The Letter of an Old Bolshevik". In ed. J.D. Zagoria, *Power and the Soviet Elite: The Letter of an Old Bolshevik and Other Essays*. (London: Pall Mall Press, 1966), 31.

<sup>5</sup> Aleksandr Orlov, *Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*. (London: Jarrolds, 1954). Anton Antonov-Ovseenko, *The Time of Stalin*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1981).

<sup>6</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Stalin i Ordzhonikidze. Konflikty v Politburo v 1930-e gody*. (Moscow 1993), 4.

questionable that Kirov was a Stalinist, but rather whether he represented more “moderate” tendencies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a wide spectrum of sources that focus primarily on the circumstances around Kirov’s death. Rumours and speculations around possible involvement of Stalin in Kirov’s death have also contributed to scholarly interests in Kirov’s life. Discussions of Kirov’s political position in the early 1930s often occupy important parts of the narrative about the circumstances of his death. Moreover, books on the Soviet Party history and biographies of Stalin often include discussions of the nature of the relationship between Kirov and Stalin, and of Kirov’s role in the Soviet politics in the 1930s.

On the basis of Nicolaevsky’s interpretation of events in the early 1930s and memoirs of the Soviet defectors, before the opening of the Soviet archives Western scholars seemed to agree that Kirov was one of the members of a liberal grouping that opposed Stalin’s oppressive policies. For instance, on the basis of an account of a Soviet defector, Isaac Deutscher in his biography of Stalin suggested that Stalin’s leadership was divided to two groups: the so-called “liberals”, presented by Kirov, Kliment Voroshilov, Yan Rudzutak and Aleksei Kalinin, and the “radicals”, typified by Viacheslav Molotov and Lazar Kaganovich, Stalin’s closest associates.<sup>7</sup> In 1968 the British historian Robert Conquest in his assessment of the origins, scale and implications of the Great Terror in the late 1930s concluded that Stalin set up Kirov’s murder in order to destroy his rival, and the liberal policies he represented. According to Conquest, Kirov’s murder was a part of Stalin’s grand plan to suppress all possible opposition, which actually happened by the late 1930s.<sup>8</sup> Roy Medvedev, a Soviet dissident historian, came to a similar conclusion in his first book *Let History Judge* which was published in English in 1972. Like Conquest he suggested that Kirov was removed from the political arena on the basis of his oppositional stance towards Stalin.<sup>9</sup> In a supplementary book on Stalin and Stalinism, published in 1979, Medvedev implied that domestic issues in the Soviet Union were formed as a result of disagreements between two well defined groups: “moderates” and “extremists”, or, as it were described at the time, between “doves” and “hawks”. Kirov was suggested to be one of the members of a “moderate” faction by

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<sup>7</sup> Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin. A Political Biography*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), 354.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror*. (London: Macmillan, 1968), 36-42.

<sup>9</sup> Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 44.

Medvedev.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, in Adam Ulam's Stalin biography published in 1973 Ulam questioned rumours about Kirov's liberal position in the Soviet party.<sup>11</sup>

Western scholars did not gain access to much of the unofficial documentation in the Soviet Union in the Cold War context. As a result, their interpretations were primarily based on the released statements during the Khrushchev period in the late 1950s and early 1960s, their personal perceptions of Stalin's regime, some memoirs of Stalin's contemporaries, accounts of the Soviet émigrés and defectors published mainly abroad, as well as the Soviet literature and feature literature. As a result of the limited access to the archival documentation, existing speculations, rumours and theories provided that basis for evidence of Kirov's "moderate" position in the Soviet Communist Party.

In the middle of the 1980s, the traditionalist perspective that Kirov represented an alternative political course in opposition to Stalin's was challenged by a general re-evaluation of Soviet history of the early 1930s. If earlier historians focused on actors as an explanatory factor of Stalin's regime, especially Stalin's malicious personality, the so-called revisionists, typically represented by the American historian J. Arch Getty, followed a structuralist approach in their interpretations of Stalin's period. Although in 1985 Getty's *Origins of the Great Purges* was primarily devoted to the causes of the political purges in the 1930s, Getty also included an appendix that questioned Kirov's "moderate" position in the Soviet Communist Party. Taking both the general context of the Soviet politics in the 1930s and the new approach into consideration, he questioned the reliability of previous accounts and denied the theory that Kirov could have represented any alternative views in the 1930s.<sup>12</sup>

The traditionalist views about Kirov's political standing did not change despite the appearance of new interpretations of the revisionists. In 1989, Conquest published *Stalin and the Kirov Murder*, where he still suggested that Kirov resisted Stalin's administrative pressure and the killing of political opponents, and advocated more moderate reforms than Stalin.<sup>13</sup> Revisionists, on the other hand, were accused of being admirers of Stalin, whereas the traditionalist were criticised of oversimplifying Stalinism.

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of the archives in 1991 more doubts were raised regarding Kirov's alternative position within the Soviet leadership.

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<sup>10</sup> Roy Medvedev, *On Stalin and Stalinism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 94.

<sup>11</sup> Adam Ulam, *Stalin: the Man and his Era*. (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 386.

<sup>12</sup> John Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges*. Paperback edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, First published 1985, 1987), 92-94.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Conquest, *Stalin and the Kirov Murder*. (New York: Oxford Press, 1989), 29.

On the grounds of the extensive research of the available archival documentation, a new generation of Russian scholars argued that traditional theories about Kirov's "moderate" political views were historically inaccurate. Many of the earlier accounts and speculations were checked against the accessible primary documentation. For instance, the Russian historian Alla Kirilina, after thorough research of most of the archival documentation regarding Sergei Kirov, in 1993 concluded that Kirov did not lead a group of moderates and he did not represent a political threat to Stalin. She suggested that, over the years Kirov dutifully followed Stalin's line.<sup>14</sup> Kirilina based her conclusions on the investigation of Kirov's personal archive, as well as classified documents from the investigation committees that were set up at different times to examine the circumstances of Kirov's assassination. Although Kirilina's research represents an important source for the analysis of Kirov's political standing, it should be noted that her argumentation tends to be selective at times.

In his systematic evaluation of the mechanism of policy-making in the early 1930s in the Soviet Union, another Russian scholar Oleg Khlevniuk in 1996 came to a similar conclusion to that of Kirilina. Similarly to Kirilina, Khlevniuk also implied in his evaluation of Kirov that he did not represent any independent set of reforms, rather that he was one of the most loyal representatives of Stalin's clique.<sup>15</sup> Khlevniuk's research was primarily based on the examination of Kirov's role at the Politburo meetings and other central meetings. Khlevniuk has also carried out research on the career of Sergo Ordzhonikidze, a close associate of Stalin and Kirov. Other publications of Khlevniuk, devoted to Ordzhonikidze's career for example, have broadened present investigation of Kirov's role in the politics and his relationship with other members of the Stalin circle.

Amy Knight's *Who Killed Kirov?* published in 1999, represents one of the relatively recent research efforts on Kirov's life. Although one of Knight's main objectives was to evaluate Stalin's role in Kirov's murder, much of her book was devoted to Kirov's biography. Knight suggested that Kirov retained some of his moderation over the years. In her portrayal of Kirov Knight presented him in a rather appealing manner, the way Kirov was presented in many of the Soviet accounts. Although she did not directly conclude that Kirov could have been a political rival to Stalin, there is an impression that he showed certain hesitancy towards Stalin's policies. Knight's account focused primarily on Kirov as a person and a politician;

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<sup>14</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Rikoshet, ili skolko chelovek bylo ubito vystrelom v Smolnom*. (St. Petersburg: Znanie, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Politburo. Mekhanizmy politicheskoi vlasti v 1930-e gody*. (Moscow: Rosspen, 1996). In 2009 Khlevniuk published a substantial revision of his book in English, which will be used in this MA dissertation. Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).

her narrative tended to lack more general political and social context in Soviet politics. In the end, Amy Knight seemed to support Conquest's thesis on Stalin's involvement in Kirov's murder due to Kirov's reformist political standing.<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that Knight's evaluation was by and large based on the research of Kirov's personal archive including narratives from scholars of the totalitarian school, such as Conquest and Richard Pipes, as well as many published accounts during the Soviet Union.

One of the newest works of the assassination of Kirov was presented in Norwegian by my supervisor, Professor of history, Åsmund Egge.<sup>17</sup> Egge's *Kirov-Gåten (The Kirov Enigma)*, published in November 2009, was based primarily on similar sources as used in this dissertation. It should be noted that the present research has been carried out simultaneously with that of Egge. Similar to Getty, Kirilina and Khlevniuk, Egge questioned Kirov's alternative position within the Soviet Communist Party. Egge's book was focused on the murder of Kirov and those involved, whereas this dissertation will be devoted to Kirov's role in top Soviet politics rather than circumstances of his death.

Matthew Lenoe's forthcoming book *The Kirov Murder and Soviet History* in the end of May in 2010 should be also mentioned in terms of recent research. In combination with interpretation of various Soviet investigation committees of the Kirov murder, Lenoe seems to include new documents, he acquired during his fellowship in Japan.<sup>18</sup> Due to Lenoe's kind permission to refer to his upcoming work it may be noted that the first quarter of his book will be devoted to Kirov's political career. In his interpretation of Kirov's political role, Lenoe seems to incline that Kirov did not represent a "moderate" faction of the Soviet Communist Party.

## PRIMARY SOURCES

Critical analysis of sources will provide the main research method in determining Kirov's political position. From 1991 scholars have gained access to many of the documents that earlier were classified. Most of Kirov's archival sources are preserved in Moscow in the Russian State Archive for Social and Political History (RGASPI, Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsialno-Politicheskoi Istorii), the former Central Party Archive of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. With the exception of

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<sup>16</sup> Amy Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Åsmund Egge, *Kirov-Gåten*. (Oslo: Unipub, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Matthew E. Lenoe, "Key to the Kirov Murder on the Shelves of Hokkaido University Library", [http://src-home.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/pdf\\_seminar/20060317/lenoe.pdf](http://src-home.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/pdf_seminar/20060317/lenoe.pdf) visited 16.04.2010, 12 April 2010, local time 12.37.

some of the documents from Stalin's personal archive that were under scanning it was not challenging to collect necessary relevant information in the RGASPI. The required information has been gathered from four trips to the archives.

The collections of original material regarding Kirov in the RGASPI include various stenographic reports of his speeches and his personal corrections, some hand-written preparatory notes, and correspondence, both personal as well as formal. All of these documents have contributed to understanding of Kirov's political preferences, his motives and intentions. For instance, letters and telegrams were an important means of communication between the Communist Party members in the 1930s. Personal correspondence between the Party members, also available in the RGASPI, can reveal the real nature of the relationships within the Party leadership. It should be noted that personal letters were not entirely dedicated only to personal issues, such as the state of health, but also to certain political decisions and arguments. The main drawback is that letters and telegrams are fragmentary since the Party members mainly wrote to each other when one of them was holidaying.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, they cannot provide the only basis for interpretation. It is noteworthy that there seems to be a gap in the correspondence between Stalin and Kirov. It is unclear whether some of the letters were removed. There is the view that Mamiia Orakhelashvili, Kirov's friend from the Caucasus, removed some of the letters sent between Stalin and Kirov after Kirov's death. However, it is not known which letters exactly had been withdrawn.<sup>20</sup>

Most of the Kirov archival documents are microfilmed. It is possible to order originals of those documents that have been declassified only recently. Documents in the RGASPI are organised by collections, *fond*, (f.), then inventory, *opis* (op.), file, *delo* (d.) and pages, *list* (l.). The quality of the documents in the Kirov fond is quite varying, from relatively good quality to unreadable texts. The unreadable areas did not generally cause challenges for the outcome of the present interpretation.

Since the RGASPI archive in Moscow contains one of the most profound collections of Kirov's documentation, it has therefore not been required to visit the Leningrad Party archive in St. Petersburg. The RGASPI has also preserved Kirov's documents that were donated by Kirov's flat, today a museum in Kirov's honour in St. Petersburg. Additionally, many of the classified files regarding Kirov's life that were retained in the Presidential archive, one of the privileged archives, have been recently transferred to the RGASPI. Although the archive does

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<sup>19</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, xxi.

<sup>20</sup> A.Yakovlev, "O dekabrskoii tragedii" in *Pravda* Nr. 24, 28.01.1991, 1.

not seem to cover all of the aspects of Kirov's activities in Leningrad, the official character of the documents has not however challenged the outcome of the research. In addition to the documents preserved in the RGASPI, Kirov's speeches were also published on a regular basis in the central newspaper *Pravda* and more importantly in the daily regional newspaper *Leningradskaiia Pravda*. Additionally, there are several collections of Kirov's speeches although edited, that have been published over the years.

It is noteworthy that there is also a set of archival documents regarding Kirov's death preserved in the Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii, RGANI, also in Moscow. These documents primarily stem from the investigation committees set at different times. There have been altogether seven commissions that have investigated Kirov's murder between 1956 and 2004 under Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin. Officially, researchers have been granted permission to access these documents in the RGANI. However, according to personal experience of my advisor Åsmund Egge, the reality is more complicated than that. Over the years many prominent Russian scholars have had an opportunity to look through the fifty-eight volumes of the Kirov case in the RGANI. As a result certain documentation can be found in the secondary literature, such as in the analyses of Alla Kirilina and Oleg Khlevniuk, articles of Yakovlev, a leader of the Gorbachev investigation committee, and others who have had access to the documents.

As well as documents from the Kirov archive, collections of documents of Kirov's close associates, such as Stalin, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, Viacheslav Molotov and Nikolai Bukharin, are also available in the RGASPI. Some of the required documents have been published in various collections of first-hand documents either in English or Russian. As for the official documents, the stenographic reports of the central as well as local meetings of the highest party and state authorities, and their decisions, are available from the pre-war years in the RGASPI. They have revealed Kirov's as well as Stalin's role in crucial political matters in the 1930s.

The Politburo archive is of utmost importance in the assessment of Kirov's role in Soviet politics, since the Politburo was the main policy-making body in the Soviet Union. Kirov officially joined the Politburo in 1930. From the early 1920s until the collapse of the Soviet system in 1991 the Politburo was the supreme agency of state power. It approved all important and many minor decisions by party, state and many other bodies. The protocols of Politburo meetings were sent only to members of the party Central Committee, and had to be returned by them within three days. Other officials merely received extracts, *vypiski*, from the



reports including those decisions which affected them directly. Particularly secret decisions were recorded separately and classified as a special file, *osobaia papka*. The special files were not sent even to members of the Central Committee. Instead extracts containing individual decisions were communicated only to those few persons who needed to know.<sup>21</sup> Many of the special files are still unavailable for the public. Nevertheless, in 2007 some of the important Politburo meetings on the central cases from the period 1923 to 1938 were published in three volumes as a collection of stenographic reports.<sup>22</sup> Otherwise, since the year 2000, much of the earlier unavailable documentation from the 1920s and 1930s has been newly published in a collection of essays, for instance, *The Lost Politburo Transcripts*, in 2008.<sup>23</sup>

Besides a few brief personal notes on his biography that were supposed to be published in the Soviet Union, there is no autobiography or memoirs left by Kirov. Nonetheless, there are existing memoirs of other key party members close to both Stalin and Kirov, such as Molotov, Mikoyan and Khrushchev. Their recollections present insightful information about the perception of Kirov by his peers, as well as a presentation of general political matters.

It should be noted that it was not common to write memoirs during the Soviet time. One of the researchers suggested that, 'The reason for this [not writing memoirs or autobiographies] was a parallel belief in the paramount importance of the Party [...] as opposed to the individual.'<sup>24</sup> Whatever the reasons, most of the existing memoirs of the Communist key figures were written in the later years of the Soviet Union's existence. The relation of reality and text is one of the most central problems within using memoirs as historical sources. First and foremost, memory is quite selective. Also, the authors of the recollections were central figures in the Soviet history, even to a certain degree idols. Therefore self-representation and a good measure of whitewashing the self could be an important factor in writing memoirs. For instance, Molotov, one of Stalin's closest associates, presented himself to his last days as the loyal Stalinist in his conversations with Felix Chuev, despite all the negative experiences during the later part of the Stalin-era. Another challenge is that many of the assumptions central in the theory that Kirov presented a moderate course in the Party have been based on very often oral recollections of people who did not leave written accounts of their stories.

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<sup>21</sup> R.W. Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 146.

<sup>22</sup> Yu. A. Vatlina and Paul Gregory, *Stenogrammy zasedanii Politburo CK RKP(b)- VKP(b) 1923-1938*. (Moscow: Rosspen, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Paul Gregory and Norman Naimark, *The Lost Politburo Transcripts*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Janos Bak, *Political Biography and Memoir in Totalitarian Eastern Europe*. In edited by George Egerton, *Political Memoir*. (London: F. Cass, 1994), 293.

These speculations will be considered in light of a relative context as a way of interpreting an event.

## **SPEECHES AND INTERPRETATION**

Kirov's speeches and official statements at the local as well as central meetings provide the basis for answering the main question of whether Kirov represented a "moderate" opposition to Stalin's main policies. There are scholars, such as Amy Knight and, Roy Medvedev who claimed that there were certain signs of moderation in Kirov's official statements in comparison with other Stalinists. There are, however, certain challenges in interpretation of Kirov's statements as well as speeches of other Communists.

One of the major challenges in the interpretation of the sources is due to the ideological implications of the language used by the Communists. It would be oversimplifying to assume that the statements alone may provide the only objective answer to the actual political point of view. Rhetoric played a significant role in the formation of the Bolshevik dominant ideology and the social order since the October Revolution of 1917. Bolshevik reality was deliberately created and maintained from above. In general the statements of the Soviet officials were produced and written with great care and were intended to provide rules and parameters for political and social behaviour. Additionally, the texts were carefully edited, reflecting prescribed linguistic formulations and agreed upon slogans and phrases.<sup>25</sup> Therefore the language played a normative function. Also, due to the policy of democratic centralism, already present during the regime of Vladimir Lenin, the party members were obliged to reflect central decisions in their official statements. The principles of the democratic centralism allowed free and open discussion until a decision was adopted. Thereafter it was the duty of all party members to defend publicly and support the general line, the adopted policy of the Bolshevik party. Therefore, controlled by the censorship, external as well as personal Stalinist rhetoric was in many ways hegemonic and claimed to be monopolistic. Besides, official texts did not tolerate competing discourse. Deviation from the party line was even a state crime: anti-Soviet agitation.<sup>26</sup> The question is, however, if controlled by the state how the narrative can then provide the answer to the overall research question of the present dissertation.

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<sup>25</sup> John Arch Getty, "Samokritika Rituals in the Stalinist Central Committee 1933-1938". In *Russian Review*, Vol. 58, No.1, January 1999, 49.

<sup>26</sup> John Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov, *The Road to Terror. Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 20.

Although the discourse was centrally controlled and checked, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that there was no place for linguistic manoeuvre. Language use could provide some unintended results, or so-called ideological slips. Besides, the Stalinist rhetoric was attributive rather than strictly definitional.<sup>27</sup> The text should be considered in its practical context and against its author in order to establish its meaning. I would claim that the context of political factors determines the meaning of the given text and may provide the framework for interpretation. Some of the documents were meant for the public, whereas others were intended for the use of the Soviet elite secretly. Therefore the context is central to the interpretation of utterances of an agent of speaking or writing.

It seems that published accounts of local party meeting tend to be less heavily censored. Since they were intended for party audiences, matters were sometimes discussed relatively openly. Such accounts are of the utmost importance for this Master dissertation research question. A majority of Kirov's speeches from the local meetings in Leningrad therefore provide some important information about his political preferences. Additionally, Kirov made corrections of his speeches before their publishing. Those corrections are available at the RGASPI. Moreover, comparisons of Kirov's speeches and expressions with other top Communist leaders may provide a better understanding of Kirov's political life as well as the political situation in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Such comparison can demonstrate the existence of similarities or differences in ideological thinking. Both contradictions and extreme similarities may provoke suspicions about the objectivity of the source.

## WRITING A BIOGRAPHY

The research on Kirov's political position in the 1930s is often connected to possible motives behind his murder. However, there is still a need for a full-scale study of Kirov's political career in order to understand his political vision. The biographical approach provides a researcher with the best opportunity to study an individuals' development over time. In this case, a biographical genre provides a better understanding of Kirov as a politician. Kirov himself noticed that, 'those of us who belong to the older generation are still influenced up to ninety percent by the baggage which we acquired during the old underground years'.<sup>28</sup> Therefore in order to understand what kind of politician Kirov was it is necessary to estimate his whole career and to learn how he rose to the top of the Stalin political system.

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<sup>27</sup> John Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, 1999, 21.

<sup>28</sup> S.M. Kirov, *Izbrannye stati i rechi*. (Moscow, 1939), 694. Also used in John Biggart, "Kirov before the Revolution" in *Soviet Studies*, volume 23, Nr.3, 1972, 348.

Additionally, it is easier to include other explanatory factors, such as general political context and influence of the surroundings and circumstances.

On the whole, a biography may be defined as a written account of a person's life in a given period of time.<sup>29</sup> There are biographies written as chronological narrations that describe a person's life from cradle to grave and there are thematic biographies that concentrate on central and significant events in the life of an individual.<sup>30</sup> I have chosen to write a political biography where the focus will be on Kirov as a political figure. Thematic biographies like this are supposed to provide a better understanding of events in a more general sense.<sup>31</sup> Kirov's case individually may provide an overall picture of the Soviet politics in the 1930s and its mechanisms. It may also demonstrate the relationship between the Communists on the top level of the Bolshevik Party. Nevertheless, it is quite difficult to ignore Kirov's personal life, since it may provide some answers to the motives behind some of his actions. In order to understand Kirov's life adequately a researcher needs to take into account other facets that shaped his work: his motives, drives and contexts which made him up as a political leader. On the one hand, the main focus is Kirov's political biography, while at the same time it is necessary to recognise the reality of social and political context and interpret Kirov's political life within the framework of social connections and networks.<sup>32</sup>

There are several reasons for why historians tend to choose a biographical approach as the main genre for their research. The object for investigation may be a typical representation of the society in which he lived. His personality and life may be a reflection of that society.<sup>33</sup> Another reason may be an individual's profound influence on his contemporary environment. An individual's life may be interesting merely because of his connections with the surrounding society and a biography is one way of understanding the more general picture.<sup>34</sup> The last reason seems to be representative for this MA dissertation. By focusing upon Kirov's role in Soviet politics, the whole political context can be made clearer. Kirov was a man of his time and therefore, indirectly, his political biography may provide a better understanding of being a Communist of the top elite, in addition to the work of the Communists on the local level. Kirov's life is representative of the Soviet *nomenklatura*, the Soviet Communist elite.

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<sup>29</sup> Marianne Egeland, *Hvem bestemmer over livet? Biografien som historisk og litterær genre*. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2000), 73.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>31</sup> Trond Nordby, "Den historiske biografi III". In *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift* Nr. 2, 1986, 71.

<sup>32</sup> Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Writing Biography. Historians and their Craft*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), x.

<sup>33</sup> Knut Kjeldstadli, *Fortida er ikke hva den en gang var*. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2003), 31.

<sup>34</sup> Trond Nordby, "Den historiske biografi III" in *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift* Nr.2 1986, 70.

One of the major challenges of writing a biography lies within the fact that the presentation of an individual may depend on the author's personal interpretations and his or her own background. It should be noted that before the beginning of the research the author of this dissertation was influenced by a common assumption among the Russian population that Sergei Kirov represented a popular political alternative to Stalin.

## FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH AND STRUCTURE

Kirov's death ultimately led to repressions of all real and imagined opposition groups and resulted in the greatest political purge in Soviet Union history, often referred to as the Great Terror. The Soviet police and the Soviet administration with Stalin at its head accused Stalin's former oppositionists in cooperation with Leonid Nikolaev, a disturbed party member who shot Kirov. The disastrous results of Kirov's death, in combination with sparse information about the circumstances of his death, which also seemed somewhat suspicious, have led to speculations about the motives behind Kirov's assassination. The first rumours about Stalin's involvement in Kirov's murder appeared already in the first days after Kirov's death in 1934. People were secretly singing, "Gherkins are green, tomatoes are red, / Stalin in a corridor shot Kirov dead".<sup>35</sup> It is still controversial today whether Kirov's death was a result of an individual act of an unstable and dissatisfied man, Leonid Nikolaev, or whether it was part of a larger conspiracy involving the secret police *Narodny Kommissariat Vnutrennikh Del*, (NKVD), and Stalin. Nevertheless, the main focus of this dissertation will be devoted to Kirov's political position in the Soviet politics rather than the circumstances of his death. This MA dissertation is not an attempt to clarify the circumstances of Kirov's death but rather to analyse his political background. The discussion has been narrowed to focus on Kirov's work in Leningrad between 1926 and 1934 which proceeded during the early years of the Stalinist regime.

The analysis will be primarily limited to the domestic politics of the Soviet Union. It has been decided to concentrate mainly on such issues as economic planning and the fate of oppositionists because these matters were central in the Party debates in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Due to the biographical approach, this dissertation is structured chronologically in its main parts as well as thematically in its subsections. The second chapter is devoted to the Kirov's political background before his appointment as the leader of the Leningrad Party Committee in 1926. It focuses on Kirov's pre-revolutionary activities, his motives behind

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<sup>35</sup> Translated as in Donald Rayfield, *Stalin and his Hangmen. The Tyrant and Those who Killed for Him*. (UK: Penguin, 2004), 247.

becoming a Bolshevik, his role during the October Revolution of 1917 and his acquaintance with Stalin. Chapter Three discusses Kirov's role in the campaign against Stalin's political rivals, Grigory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev, in Leningrad during the period between 1926 and 1929. Chapter Four examines Kirov's position towards the First Five Year Plan, policies of collectivisation and industrialisation, and the campaign against the Right Deviation, presented by Nikolai Bukharin. Additionally, the chapter includes the assessment of collectivisation and industrialisation of the Leningrad region from 1929 to 1932. It seeks to investigate whether the central policies were implemented in different ways than in other regions. Chapter Five discusses theories and speculations around Kirov's presumably independent position in the early 1930s and possible political conflicts between Kirov and Stalin in the period between 1930 and 1934.

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Since his death in December 1934, Kirov has been portrayed principally in an agreeable manner in the official sources in the Soviet Union. In the local Leningrad newspaper *Leningradskaja Pravda*, there are a great amount of articles devoted to the recollections of the Leningrad workers, and Kirov's colleagues and friends. In those articles, and later in his biographies, Kirov had been portrayed in a very likeable manner: as a favourite of the masses, and a dedicated Bolshevik. Recollections of different contemporaries also presented Kirov in an appealing way: "Kirov was loved and respected for his tireless ability to work, and devotion to party's principles, for his simplicity and warmth in communication."<sup>36</sup> Another recollection characterised Kirov in the following way, "He was able to treat equally any man, and he could find a way to any heart. I want to be like Kirov."<sup>37</sup> Since 1934, streets, theatres, plants and factories were named in honour of Kirov all around the Soviet Union. The city Vyatka in the Kirov region was renamed as the Kirov city some days after his death. Moreover, Kirov's life story was supposed to set an example for the Soviet children in the biographical book *The Boy from Urzhum*. Even today when many of the streets in Russia are being renamed back to their pre-revolutionary names, due to the break off with the Communist past, the Kirov streets seem to preserve their names. Primarily positive characterisations throughout the decades may explain why Kirov was singled out as a possible antagonist to Stalin. However, the theory that Kirov represented a coherent resistance to Stalin in the 1930s must be checked against the newly-available internal documentation from the Soviet Communist Party.

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<sup>36</sup> V.M. Ivanov, *Nash Mironych. Vospominaniia o zhizni i deiatelnosti S.M. Kirova v Leningrade*, 1970, 39.

<sup>37</sup> V.Kaverin, "Vospominaniia o Kirove" in *Zvezda* Nr. 12, 1939, 145.

## CHAPTER 2: BECOMING A BOLSHEVIK

### SERGEI KIROV'S POLITICAL CAREER BEFORE 1926

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#### INTRODUCTION

Sergei Kirov's pre-revolutionary experiences have been causing discussions about the nature of his Bolshevism prior to the October Revolution of 1917. In 1929, Kirov was accused of the vacillation between different revolutionary movements before choosing the Bolshevik line in 1917. Due to the so-called "party purity" and the length of the "party service" being very important for the Bolshevik reputation, those accusations represented a serious matter against Kirov as a Bolshevik. Was Kirov a staunch Bolshevik from the start or did he doubt his political preferences? Such a background will clarify what kind of politician Kirov was before his appointment as a Party Chief of Leningrad in 1926.

#### POLITICAL AWAKENINGS

Sergei Mironovich Kirov was born under the surname Kostrikov in March 1886. Like many other revolutionaries, Kostrikov adopted his pseudonym Kirov during his years of underground political activities. Kirov was born into a petty bourgeois family in Urzhum, a typical merchant town in the Vyatka region, which is the Kirov region today. From early on Kirov's life was full of hardship and sorrow. At an early age he lost both of his parents: his father left the family when Kirov was young, whereas his mother died of tuberculosis before he turned eight. Unable to take care of the three children Kirov and his two sisters, Kirov's eighty year old grandmother had to place Sergei in the Urzhum Children's Home, *dom prizreniia*. At the orphanage school Kirov occurred as a devoted, talented and hard-working student.<sup>38</sup>

Urzhum occupied a special place in Kirov's early political education. Due to its remote placement the town had been used as a place for political exiles by the tsars. Apparently Kirov was in contact with numerous political exiles during summer vacations at his grandmother's house. According to Kirov's autobiographical account preserved in the RGASPI, acquaintances with exiles provided Kirov with an opportunity to attend

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<sup>38</sup> Kirilina had published many of her articles about Kirov's life and death in Russian leading historical journals, but most of her conclusions are gathered in an extensive work on Kirov which was published in 2001. Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov. Mify i realnost*. (St. Petersburg: Olma-Press, 2001), 9-16.

underground discussion clubs where he obtained illegal literature.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, the contacts with the exiles in Urzhum led to interactions with radical students in Kazan, where in 1901 Kirov studied mechanical engineering.

With its university, Kazan was an important cultural centre. While studying in Kazan Kirov became involved in student underground clubs and read illegal literature. It is unclear what kind of political preferences Kirov had in Kazan, but he himself claimed in his later autobiography that already then he had adhered to Social Democrats.<sup>40</sup> Due to the narrow amount of sources around Kirov's early years it is hard to assess the reliability of that statement. While reading Bolshevik autobiographies, it should be kept in mind that the length of the political service was very important for them. In later years the Bolsheviks tried to prove that their period of political commitment to Bolshevism was longer than it actually was.<sup>41</sup> At the same time the Bolsheviks were quite strict about lying about their political service. Regardless of Kirov's political preferences in Kazan, his actual revolutionary career began in Tomsk, Siberia, where he intended to proceed with higher education.

In 1904, Kirov officially joined the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDRP), which existed since 1898. The RSDRP was popular among the youth and workers. As a RSDRP member, Kirov enthusiastically participated in demonstrations and May meetings. His responsibilities included propaganda printing, distribution of illegal literature and agitation among the workers. Furthermore, he helped to set up and operate an underground printing press for Party Literature, for which he got arrested in later years.<sup>42</sup> As a result of the active involvement in the underground activities of the RSDRP, Kirov's education plans were delayed.

It is noteworthy that by the time Kirov became a member of the RSDRP certain changes took place in the leadership of the party. In 1903, the leadership of the RSDRP split into two factions: the Bolsheviks, the "majority"; and the Mensheviks, the "minority". The Bolsheviks led by Vladimir Lenin projected the overthrow of the monarchy that would be followed by provisional revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. On the other hand, the Mensheviks suggested that Russia should undergo a bourgeois revolution and complete her development of a capitalist economy before transition to socialism.<sup>43</sup> Despite the

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<sup>39</sup> *Autobiography of Kirov*, RGASPI, f. 80, op. 10, d. 18, l. 1, 1926.

<sup>40</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov. Mify i realnost*, 2001, 15.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>42</sup> *Autobiography of Kirov*, RGASPI, f. 80, op. 10, d. 18, l. 2, 1926.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Service, *Russia. From Tsarism to the Twenty-First Century*, third edition, (UK: Penguin Books, 2009), 19.



split in the leadership, there were only minor changes in the regional party committees. Bolsheviks and Mensheviks coexisted more or less peacefully on the regional level even after the official split. The Tomsk RSDRP committee, where Kirov was a member, was dominated by the Mensheviks. Even so, associations with the more leftist members of the Tomsk RSDRP Committee and Kirov's membership in the fighting squads, *druzhina*, placed him within the Bolshevik faction rather than the Menshevik one.<sup>44</sup> All in all it is rather unclear whether Kirov felt pressure to choose between the two factions at that time. Kirov's role in the 1905 uprising under the leadership of the Socialist Revolutionaries and Social Democrats against the existing regime seems to be exaggerated by the Soviet biographers, who claimed that there was no more energetic member than Kirov within the Tomsk underground organisation.<sup>45</sup> Kirov was arrested during the events of 1905, but he did not seem to play any leading role in the political matters of the Tomsk RSDRP Committee rather than usual responsibilities of a party member.<sup>46</sup>

### A REVOLUTIONARY OR A JOURNALIST?

Kirov's revolutionary activities in Tomsk came to an end with his third arrest in 1906 for running of an illegal underground printing establishment. Due to the lack of evidence against him, he was released in 1908. As a result of the police record in Siberia Kirov had to hide in Irkutsk and Novonikolaevsk until 1909 when he moved to Vladikavkaz in North Caucasus. The Vladikavkaz period was an important stage in Kirov's life. There he started working at a local newspaper *Terek* first as a corrector then later as a journalist and a senior editor. During his work in the *Terek* he met his future wife Maria Lvovna. In Vladikavkaz he first started to sign his articles under the name of S. Kirov and since then he became known as Sergei Kirov. It is uncertain whether he chose his pseudonym in honour of an ancient Persian general, or his name originated from the Greek word *Kir*, meaning a warrior, or whether he accidentally picked the name of the saint Kira from a calendar of saint names.<sup>47</sup>

The Vladikavkaz period is central in the discussion of Kirov's political preferences before the October Revolution of 1917. Several times throughout his political career Kirov would be accused of deviation from Bolshevism on the grounds of his working in *Terek*. Apparently *Terek* was a daily newspaper of liberal editorial policy.<sup>48</sup> Writing for a bourgeois newspaper

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<sup>44</sup> John Biggart, "Kirov before the Revolution" in *Soviet Studies*, volume 23, Nr.3, 1972, 352.

<sup>45</sup> S. Sinelnikov, *Kirov. Zhizn zamechatelnykh liudei*, Moscow 1964, 81.

<sup>46</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov. Mify i realnost*, 2001, 20.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 22 and Åsmund Egge, *Kirov-Gåten*, Unipub, 2009, 30.

<sup>48</sup> V. Dubrovin, *Povest o plamennom publitsiste*, (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1969), 19.

on a regular basis made Kirov's revolutionary involvement questionable from the orthodox Bolshevik point of view. The Bolsheviks generally did not approve using the non-party press for the main Party debates.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, it should be noted that in some cases the Bolsheviks allowed some participation in the non party press for the promotion of the Social Democratic ideas. Lenin himself in 1909 urged party members to spread revolutionary ideas by any means possible, legal or illegal.<sup>50</sup> Soviet scholars, for example, justified Kirov's working in the *Terek* as a legitimate way for the promotion of the ideas of Social Democracy and as a way to attract more party members.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, professional revolutionaries usually had some legal supplemental occupations in addition to underground responsibilities. The question was whether that occupation was compatible or not with those activities ideologically.

Due to the inhibiting effect of the Czarist censorship, it is difficult to estimate Kirov's actual political inclinations in the *Terek*. Throughout his work in the newspaper Kirov published thousands of articles. He covered a broad spectre of various topics: political, economic and social. His articles included such urgent for that time issues as hardships of peasants, the struggle of the working class against capitalism, the agrarian question, ethnical disunity in the Terek region, failures of the tsar and the Duma and foreign affairs.<sup>52</sup> He criticised the Czarist regime. In many ways Kirov revealed himself as a revolutionary in his writing, but it is questionable whether he distinguished himself as a real Leninist at that time.

The Soviet sources portrayed Kirov as an active revolutionary and a real Leninist, besides his journalist work in Vladikavkaz. According to the Soviet accounts he arranged political Sunday schools, spread illegal revolutionary literature, spoke at the May demonstration and read Lenin's works. In addition to that, Kirov preserved contacts with Moscow, and tried to restore a friendly relationship with neighbouring Bolsheviks.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, it should be taken into consideration that Soviet sources could exaggerate Kirov's political involvement. For instance, there is a suggestion that the chief purpose of the ties with neighbouring Bolsheviks was to obtain illegal Marxist literature rather than to coordinate underground activities.<sup>54</sup> Although Kirov participated in the revival of the Social Democratic movement in the Caucasus, other Bolsheviks, such as Noi Buachidze and Mamiia Orakhelashvili, seemed

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<sup>49</sup> V. Dubrovin, *Povest o plamennom publitsiste*, Lenizdat 1969, 19.

<sup>50</sup> Amy Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery*, New York 1999, 44.

<sup>51</sup> S. Sinelnikov, *Kirov. Zhizn zamechatelnykh liudei*, (Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 1964), 121.

<sup>52</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov. Mify i realnost*, 2001, 23.

<sup>53</sup> S. Sinelnikov, *Kirov. Zhizn zamechatelnykh liudei*, 1964, 119-152.

<sup>54</sup> Richard Douglas King, *Sergei Kirov and the Struggle for Soviet Power in the Terek Region, 1917-1918*, (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1987), 35.

to play a more decisive role in the reviving of the revolutionary organisation in the Caucasus than Kirov.<sup>55</sup> Further doubts about Kirov's devotion to Bolshevism were drawn on the grounds of Kirov's support to the bourgeois Provisional Government, which was set up as a result of abdication of the tsar Nicholas II in February 1917.

## DEVIATIONS FROM BOLSHEVISM

The period before the October Revolution of 1917, when the Bolsheviks seized power, has been labelled as a period of vacillation and doubt in Kirov's political life. Kirov sympathised with the Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks, under the leadership of Lenin, did not approve of cooperation with either the Provisional Government, labelled as bourgeois government, or the Petrograd Soviet, which consisted of other Socialist parties, such as the Mensheviks. Mensheviks, on the other hand, favoured some cooperation with the Provisional Government. Lenin claimed that cooperation with the Provisional government would put the revolution on hold, while Kirov suggested that the establishment of the Provisional Government was only the first act on the way to the revolution and gave opportunities for the strengthening of the Bolshevik positions in the Terek region.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, Kirov's sympathetic statements about the Provisional Government placed him on the side of the Mensheviks rather than the Bolsheviks in the spring of 1917. Kirov's articles written in the period between March and July 1917 were not published in later years in the Soviet Union, and references to them were not allowed.<sup>57</sup>

Soviet historians justified Kirov's position towards the Provisional government as a consequence of the lack of information coming from the centre. Generally regional Bolsheviks seemed to be surprised by the abdication of the tsar and events in Petrograd in February. Much stayed unclear in the regional committees and the Bolsheviks did not know what strategy to pursue further. Since the Bolsheviks in Petrograd did not collaborate with local Bolsheviks, Kirov was forced to act based on the conditions in Vladikavkaz. Presumably, Lenin's policies were slow to take hold in regional committees, not only in Vladikavkaz and reports reaching Vladikavkaz concerning developments in Petrograd were not detailed enough to enable Kirov to evaluate the Provisional Government correctly.<sup>58</sup> This fact may be supported by the argument that a Bolshevik, Noi Buachidze, was sent to the Terek region from the centre to persuade local Bolsheviks in Vladikavkaz to support the

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<sup>55</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov. Mify i realnost*, 2001, 28.

<sup>56</sup> N.A. Yefimov, "Sergei Mironovich Kirov" in *Voprosy Istorii* Nr.11-12, 1995, 52.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> V. Dubrovin, *Povest o plamennom publitsiste*, 1969, 88 .

Leninist line and split with the Mensheviks. Therefore, one may assume that Kirov was actually not fully aware of the Bolshevik programme in Petrograd and that is the reason he showed full support for the newly set government. Nevertheless, even after Lenin's April thesis in 1917 when he presented the official Bolshevik line, Kirov still showed support to the Provisional Government.<sup>59</sup> Hence Kirov's choice to support the Provisional Government was a conscious one from his personal persuasions.

It seems like Kirov's incongruent political position with the Bolsheviks was determined by his understanding of the local socio-political circumstances in the Terek region. There were many heterogeneous ethnical groups in the Terek region. Ninety percent of the population was engaged in agriculture and there was little proletariat in general. Moreover, there was no strong Bolshevik organisation, but a united Party Committee where the Mensheviks represented a majority.<sup>60</sup> Therefore Kirov could alienate himself in his regional party by officially joining the Bolshevik claims of no cooperation. The fact that, aside from Kirov, the Bolshevik organization in Vladikavkaz had only seven members in the period between 1912 and 1914, and by 1917 total membership had dropped to six, illustrates the lack of a united revolutionary movement in Vladikavkaz.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps it is the reason why Kirov and the remaining Bolsheviks in Vladikavkaz favoured the establishment of the united Socialist bloc as their only option of survival as Bolsheviks.

Kirov believed that the first step was to unite fighting groups and win the support from mountain people and the peasants. The democratic principle of presentation presented by the Provisional Government could be the best suited way to unite the belligerent peoples in Terek. The establishment of the power of the Soviet presented by workers and a sudden revolution could alienate mountain people and cause only more fighting between different opposed ethnic groupings in the region. Kirov rather supported gradual transition.

Lenin, on the other hand, acted from Petrograd as a reaction to the local circumstances there. It is questionable whether there was one consensual Bolshevik philosophy in 1917. The backgrounds of different revolutionaries seem to produce an impression of a diverse movement led by individuals with different political outlooks. Therefore Kirov's support of the Provisional Government and cooperation with the Mensheviks was not unique in the

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<sup>59</sup> Åsmund Egge, *Kirov-Gåten*, 2009, 32.

<sup>60</sup> N.A. Yefimov, "Sergei Mironovich Kirov" in *Voprosy Istorii* Nr.11-12, 1995, 52.

<sup>61</sup> Amy Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mysteries*, 1999, 56.

RSDRP. There were other prominent Bolsheviks, such as Lev Kamenev and Joseph Stalin, who favoured some cooperation with the Mensheviks before April 1917.<sup>62</sup>

Kirov's approving position towards the Provisional Government was shared by most other Bolshevik groups in the Terek Region.<sup>63</sup> To conclude, Kirov's revolutionary outlook in the Terek region was determined by regional developments. Although Kirov did not participate actively in the October events in Petrograd in 1917, he played an important role in the establishment of the Terek Republic and the Soviet power throughout Terek.<sup>64</sup> Kirov's clear position with the Bolshevik party became clear after the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets held in late October 1917.

### ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SOVIET POWER

After the establishment of the Bolshevik power in the Soviet Union Kirov began loyally follow the Bolshevik line. During the Civil war, from 1918 to 1921, he was sent to Astrakhan in 1919 to maintain order in the region. Apparently Kirov was personally responsible for the bloodshed during the Astrakhan revolt.<sup>65</sup> After the revolt in Astrakhan, Kirov together with other prominent Bolsheviks, such as Sergo Ordzhonikidze and Anastas Mikoyan, actively participated in the "sovietisation" of the Caucasus. He defended the idea of independence of such republics as Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, which Stalin, for example, resisted.<sup>66</sup> At the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921 Kirov was elected a candidate member of the highest body, the Central Committee, of the Soviet Workers Party, later known as the Communist Party. After the "sovietisation" of Azerbaijan, with the support of Lenin, Stalin and Ordzhonikidze, Kirov was appointed in 1921 as secretary of the Azerbaijan Communist Party.<sup>67</sup> As a regional party secretary, Kirov had responsibilities for both political and economic matters in the region. Azerbaijan was an important oil region for the economy of the Soviet Union. Kirov's top priority was development of the oil industry in the region.<sup>68</sup> In the period between 1917 and 1926 Kirov asserted his position as a staunch Bolshevik. He was acquainted with many prominent Bolsheviks and promoted his position in the hierarchy of the Party. He proved himself a decisive and careful administrator in Azerbaijan. His popularity was mainly limited to the Caucasus but he was already known then to Stalin.

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<sup>62</sup> Robert Service, *Russia. From Tsarism to the Twenty-First Century*, 2009, 35.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Douglas King, *Sergei Kirov and the Struggle for Soviet Power in the Terek Region, 1917-1918*, 1987, 74.

<sup>64</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov. Mify i realnost*, 2001, 33.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>66</sup> Amy Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery*, 1999, 79.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 97.

The first meeting between Kirov and Stalin probably happened during the Second All Soviet Congress in 1917 in Petrograd, where both Stalin and Kirov were delegates. Apparently Stalin devoted his attention specifically towards the delegation from the North Caucasus and Transcaucasia, where Kirov was a member. Although Stalin was initially sceptical of transferring Kirov to the Caucasus because Kirov advanced nationalist demands of the republics in the Caucasus, in 1918 Stalin personally recommended Kirov in a letter where he wrote that Kirov deserved full trust.<sup>69</sup> The relationship between the two became closer after Kirov's appointment as a secretary of Azerbaijan in 1921. For instance, in 1924 Stalin presented Kirov with the book *Lenin and Leninism* with an inscription, 'To S.M. Kirov, my friend and beloved brother, from the author. 23.05.24. Stalin'. Apparently Stalin gave signed copies of his books to very few people.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, numerous letters in the early 1920s between Kirov, Stalin and Ordzhonikidze reveal a friendly relationship between them.

## POLITICAL INTRIGUES

Kirov seemed to play only a secondary role in the question of political competition that happened after Lenin's death in 1924. Although Lenin himself projected the principle of collective leadership after his death, there were several contenders for his position as the leader of the Bolshevik Party. The principal rivals were Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin, Kamenev and Stalin. Each of the Bolshevik leaders believed in a one-party state and the differences with Lenin's political heritage touched mainly secondary matters.<sup>71</sup> Leon Trotsky, for example, wished to expand state planning, accelerate industrialisation and instigate revolution in Europe. Due to his position as a founder of the Red Army, Trotsky was considered by Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev as a dangerous contender for Lenin's leading position. In order to prevent Trotsky from succeeding Lenin and establishing a military regime, Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev joined an alliance against Trotsky's candidacy.

Kirov was far from the centre of the political intrigues that were happening at the top after Lenin's death. Nevertheless, as a regional party chief he was most likely aware of the events in Moscow. It is remarkable that Zinoviev and Kamenev were also worrying about Stalin's position in the party. Apparently, before Lenin's death the two conferred with Ordzhonikidze, who was a close friend of Kirov, as to how best to reduce Stalin's powers.<sup>72</sup> It may be assumed that Kirov was aware both of the political struggle against Trotsky as well as

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<sup>69</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov. Mify i realnost*, 2001, 305.

<sup>70</sup> Dmitrii Volkogonov, *Stalin. Triumph and Tragedy*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), 205.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Service, *Russia. From Tsarism to the Twenty-First Century*, 2009, 154.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 155.

Zinoviev's and Kamenev's annoyance with Stalin. It is unclear from the first-hand sources whether Kirov had any defined opinion about the political struggle after Lenin's death. As a party secretary of Azerbaijan Kirov followed general developments that were happening in the centre and vigorously fought the Trotskyites in the Caucasus.<sup>73</sup>

In his speeches delivered in Baku around that time Kirov condemned Trotsky's position of the so-called permanent revolution. Trotsky suggested that Socialist revolution should be spread to Western Europe in order for the Russian revolution to survive. Kirov did not seem to play more of a special role in the struggle against Trotskyites than any other regional party chief. Kirov's sympathies with Stalin became apparent in the question regarding the expulsion of Leon Trotsky. Zinoviev and Kamenev demanded Trotsky's expulsion from the party in 1925, whereas Stalin considered it to be unnecessary. Despite his disapproval of Trotsky's political standpoints and not particularly friendly relations with him, like Stalin, Kirov also held a rather moderate position concerning Trotsky's expulsion from the party. Kirov's position in the question of Trotsky's expulsion from the Bolshevik party may be interpreted as a sign of allegiance to Stalin in 1925. However, on the other hand Kirov based his position on the question on the grounds of Trotsky's loyalty to Bolshevism, noticing that no matter what he was one of the Old Bolsheviks who led the October Revolution and therefore should keep his membership in the Bolshevik party.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, according to Kirov, Trotsky alone did not seem to represent a threat for the party unity. Kirov's moderate position towards Trotsky mirrors of that cautious and tolerant position towards the Mensheviks before the October Revolution. Hence, such attitude could characterise Kirov as a politician generally tolerant of other political streams. Kirov's alliance with Stalin became apparent by the end of 1925 when he was personally chosen by Stalin to fight the Left Opposition formed by Zinoviev and Kamenev in Leningrad, the second most important party committee in the Soviet Union.

## CONCLUSION

Soviet sources presented Kirov's background as an exemplary biography of a good Bolshevik. Due to a limited amount of primary sources, it is generally difficult to estimate Kirov's actual political inclinations before 1917. From the existing material it may seem that Kirov accommodated to the local circumstances. Besides some involvement in the underground revolutionary activities, Kirov did not occupy any significant political position before the October Revolution as his position is unclear. Although he seemed to consider

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<sup>73</sup> S. Sinelnikov, *Kirov. Zhizn zamechatelnykh liudei*, 1964, 258.

<sup>74</sup> Amy Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery*, 1999, 105.

himself a Bolshevik his position seemed to be closer to the Menshevik one. Therefore in some way Kirov was rightfully accused of vacillation between different revolutionary movements before accepting Bolshevism in 1917. Kirov's adherence to Bolshevism clearly was manifested after the October Revolution. Since then he proved to be a staunch Bolshevik. In the early 1920s he presented himself as a good "practical" Bolshevik rather than theoreticians like Lenin or Trotsky. Although his popularity was generally limited to the Caucasus region, he had already at that time established good relations with Stalin and other prominent Bolsheviks who would play an influential role later during the Stalin regime.



## CHAPTER 3: LENINGRAD PARTY CHIEF

### SERGEI KIROV AND THE OPPOSITION IN LENINGRAD, 1926 TO 1928

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#### INTRODUCTION

In 1926, on the personal insistence of Stalin and by the decision of the Communist Party leadership, Sergei Kirov was delegated to Leningrad to fight the so-called Leningrad Oppositionists headed by the local Bolshevik party leader Grigory Zinoviev. The temporary assignment to crash the Leningrad Opposition resulted in Kirov's permanent transfer to Leningrad as the replacement for Zinoviev. The appointment as the leader of the Leningrad regional committee, *Obkom*, marked the beginning of a significant period in Kirov's political career. As a regional secretary of the Soviet Union's second most important party organisation, Kirov entered into the centre of Soviet politics. He found himself among the Party elite and close associates of Stalin. This chapter will be devoted to Kirov's political position in the period during Stalin's struggle against the Left Opposition, and later during the campaign against the United Opposition between 1926 and 1927.

#### MOSCOW VERSUS LENINGRAD

Kirov's work in Leningrad originated in the conflict that occurred between Stalin and his allies and the New or Left Opposition. In addition to personal ambitions to substitute Lenin as the leader of the Bolshevik Party, the core of the conflict between the two factions lay in the ideological and economic disputes between the leaders of the groups Stalin, Bukharin, Rykov and Tomskey on the one hand, and Zinoviev, Kamenev and Krupskaya, who was Lenin's wife, on the other. At the Fourteenth Party Congress, held in December 1925, the Left Opposition, under the leadership of the head of the Leningrad Party organisation Grigory Zinoviev and the Moscow Party Secretary Lev Kamenev, was criticised for not following the party's resolutions and for the establishment of the separate faction within the Party.<sup>75</sup> A Party Congress was the supreme ruling body of the Bolshevik/Communist Party, where different resolutions were adopted. Factions within the Bolshevik party were officially banned during Lenin regime in 1921.

Under the leadership of a party theorist, Nikolai Bukharin, Stalin's majority faction, supported the gradual transition to socialism on the basis of Lenin's New Economic Policy,

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<sup>75</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov. Mify i realnost*, 2001, 102.

NEP, whereas the Left Opposition demanded the abolishment of the NEP. The NEP was launched under the leadership of Lenin in 1921 as a necessary economic retreat policy which aimed at peaceful incorporation of peasantry. As a result of the NEP, the grain requisitioning was replaced by the tax in kind which allowed peasants to sell their surplus.<sup>76</sup> Although originally NEP was acknowledged as a necessary economic retreat, in 1925 the Left Opposition launched the critique of the NEP as the deviation from Socialism and labelled it as a capitalist policy. Stalin and Bukharin were supported by the majority of the Politburo, policy-making body. Kirov was not a Politburo member yet, but at the Fourteenth Party Congress he openly sided with the majority faction against the Zinoviev's group.

Kirov openly condemned positions of the Left Oppositionists at the Fourteenth Congress, saying that the Oppositionists 'drove themselves in a rather packed (*тесный*) corner'. In his speech he urged the comrades to help the Oppositionists to find the "correct" path.<sup>77</sup> By the correct path he most likely meant the preservation of Lenin's ideals of the democratic centralism and supporting the resolutions on the economic policies adopted by the Fourteenth Congress. He stated that "any deviation from the majority views was dangerous at the time of such a transformation".<sup>78</sup> Kirov generally seemed to favour Lenin's NEP and its "*smychka*", the union between the workers and the peasants. At the Fourteenth Congress he presented himself as a cautious politician by indicating that the situation in the countryside, especially in the Caucasus, was quite complicated and "required a more thorough analysis than hasty conclusions presented by Kamenev and the Left Opposition". He added that "the NEP created the necessary means for the state to influence economic relations in the countryside".<sup>79</sup> In his speech he also noted that "dekulakisation", understood then as the compulsory extraction of surplus from the relatively rich peasants, *kulaks*, proposed by the Leftist leaders, would not improve the situation in the countryside and that the NEP was the most suited policy for the existing situation in the countryside.<sup>80</sup> From Kirov's statements it seems that his support to the NEP measures was dictated by local conditions in his region, where peasantry represented the majority of the population.

From the stenographic reports from the Fourteenth Congress Stalin was cautious during his speech. He revealed himself as a kind of an arbiter between Bukharin and Zinoviev. He condemned the Oppositionist position like the rest of the majority. Nevertheless, at the same

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<sup>76</sup> Robert Service, *Russia. From Tsarism to the Twenty-First Century*, 2009, 124-125.

<sup>77</sup> Kirov's speech, *Stenograficheskii otchet XIV siezd VKP(b) 1926*, 378.

<sup>78</sup> RGASPI f. 80, op. 10, d. 2, l. 59, (19.01.1926).

<sup>79</sup> Kirov's speech, *Stenograficheskii otchet XIV siezd VKP(b) 1926*, 365.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 366.

time he said he was against the elimination policy: “We stand for unity, we are against amputation. The policy of amputation is abhorrent to us.”<sup>81</sup> Molotov, one of Stalin’s staunch followers, implied in his speech at the Fourteenth Congress that “Zinoviev’s faction was a mere deviation and that their political line was not parallel to that of the Central Committee”.<sup>82</sup> Therefore Kirov’s position towards the Left Opposition was in concord with Stalin and his supporters in 1925. Stalin’s faction was, by and large, cautious towards the Leningrad Opposition in their official statements.

The question of loyalty to Stalin is especially important regarding the Fourteenth Party Congress, because Kamenev and the Left Opposition brought up the issue of the growing political power in Stalin’s hands as the General Secretary of the Bolshevik party. The Party’s Secretariat was the main centre for party administration where the General Secretary obtained control over the personnel appointment.<sup>83</sup> It is arguable whether the post of the General Secretary was decisive in Stalin’s rising authority in the Party. There is the view that due to the occupied post, Stalin exercised control over the personnel and therefore was able to establish a network of loyal party members throughout the country which provided the ground for his personal leadership.<sup>84</sup> Unlike other Stalin supporters who flattered Stalin in their speeches, such as Kuibyshev for example, Kirov in his speech mentioned Stalin only once saying that Stalin was right noting that those who had oil would predominate.<sup>85</sup> There is no information in Kirov personal files of what he thought of Stalin’s rising power at that time. Nevertheless, Kirov’s appreciation of the NEP and good personal relationship with Stalin contributed to his appointment as a member of the delegation, headed by Molotov, to fight Left Oppositionists in Leningrad in the beginning of 1926. Kirov’s appointment in the delegation among other prominent Bolsheviks, such as Molotov, Mikoyan and Ordzhonikidze, signified the Party’s and Stalin’s reliance on Kirov in such important work.

### **LENINGRAD - “THE CRADLE OF THE REVOLUTION”**

Leningrad, which was known as Petrograd before Lenin’s death, was considered to be an important political and economic centre in the Soviet Union. Yevdokimov, a Petrograd Party chairman in the 1920s, probably did not exaggerate when he noted in 1925 that, ‘any blow

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<sup>81</sup> Stalin’s concluding speech, *Stenograficheskii otchet XIV siezd VKP(b) 1926*, 508 translated as in J. Stalin, Works, volume 7 1925, (Moscow, 1954), 401.

<sup>82</sup> Molotov’s concluding speech, *Stenograficheskii otchet XIV siezd VKP(b) 1926*, 170.

<sup>83</sup> Graeme Gill, *Stalinism*, Second Edition, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 10.

<sup>84</sup> E.A. Rees, “Stalin as Leader 1924-37”. In E.A. Rees, *The Nature of Stalin’s Dictatorship. The Politburo 1924-1953*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 31.

<sup>85</sup> Kirov’s speech, *Stenograficheskii otchet XIV siezd VKP(b) 1926*, 378.

against Leningrad was considered a blow against the entire party'.<sup>86</sup> Since 1917 the Petrograd party organisation, renamed Leningrad in 1924, was one of the leading organisations in the Soviet Union. Historically it was an important political and cultural centre, labelled the "cradle of the proletariat revolution", the place where the October Revolution originated. Due to the high concentration of the proletariat in comparison to other Russian cities and regions, Lenin himself attached significant importance to the Petrograd party committee saying that 'the Petrograd workers should set an example for the rest'.<sup>87</sup> Economically, Leningrad was the most important industrial city in the country by 1925.

Unlike Lenin, Stalin was not specifically fond of Leningrad; he seldom visited Leningrad.<sup>88</sup> As the 'window to the West'<sup>89</sup>, Leningrad historically was a symbol of connections between Russia and the Western world. That is why it was perceived by Stalin as 'a breeding route for flourish of foreign ideas and oppositional tendencies'.<sup>90</sup> Since Leningrad was an important political centre where ninety percent of the ten thousand members supported the Zinoviev's line<sup>91</sup>, it was therefore important for Stalin to conquer the support of the Leningrad proletariat to strengthen his authority there.

### CRASHING THE LENINGRAD OPPOSITION

Kirov vigorously promoted the CC's resolutions by speaking at the factories, plants and party committees in Leningrad. Several of Kirov's contemporaries noted that Kirov was a very skilful orator. He has been often presented as the only utter orator within the Stalin's circle. He generally spoke in a rather approachable manner and simplified complex issues, so that they became clear to the common audience. Noted by one of Kirov's biographers, 'He [Kirov] seemed to be higher than he actually was while speaking at the meetings'.<sup>92</sup> From the examined speeches Kirov really seem to appear as a convincing and inspiring orator. The language he used was rather expressive in its nature due to the use of bright comparisons and idioms. Although Kirov was an educated and well-read politician, he used language understandable to common workers. Due to the use of slang his speeches became appealing and captivating for the audience. From the correspondence with other party members, it is clear that Kirov was very busy in Leningrad speaking at the meetings. For example, Kirov

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<sup>86</sup> Yu. Vatlina, and Paul Gregory, *Stenogrammy zasedanii Politburo 1923-38*, volume 1, 1923-26. 2007, 657.

<sup>87</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, tom 45, 277.

<sup>88</sup> Amy Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery*, 1999, 113.

<sup>89</sup> Leningrad was founded in 1703 by Peter the Great. The city was considered as a bridge between Russia and Europe, marking by the expression "window to the west".

<sup>90</sup> Amy Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery*, 1999, 113.

<sup>91</sup> N.A. Yefimov, "Sergei Mironovich Kirov" in *Voprosy Istorii* Nr.11-12, 1995, 58.

<sup>92</sup> S.V. Krasnikov, *Kirov v Leningrade*, (Lenizdat, 1966), 24.

wrote to Ordzhonikidze on 16 January 1926 about his tough work in Leningrad.<sup>93</sup> According to the Soviet sources Kirov's oratory skills played a significant role in the Party's campaign against the Leftist Opposition.

Even though the Soviet researchers presented Kirov as the main hero in the struggle against the Opposition in Leningrad, it is arguable how central his role actually was. Firstly, there were only ten meetings out of eighty that were led personally by Kirov. From reading the local newspaper *Leningradskaia Pravda* in January, the impression is that Kirov did not occupy any more special position than other members of the CC delegation in Leningrad. It should be, however, noted that this was not extraordinary since Kirov was not very famous yet in Leningrad at that time. From the *Leningradskaia Pravda* it is also evident that Kirov gradually acquired more space on its pages.

There is practically no correspondence between Kirov and Stalin in the correspondence part between Stalin and other members of the Party in the period during the campaign against the Left Opposition between 8 January 1926 and 10 May 1927. From the overview of Stalin's letters in general, it seems that Stalin acquired his information from Molotov rather than Kirov in the beginning of 1926.<sup>94</sup> As it has been mentioned in the introduction, some of the letters between Stalin and Kirov could have been extracted after Kirov's death by one of Kirov's friends. Kirov's role in Leningrad should not be underestimated either: in total he delivered 180 speeches against the Opposition during the political campaign in Leningrad.<sup>95</sup>

From the statements of the Left Opposition at the Politburo meeting on the question of the president of the Leningrad Soviet on 18 March 1926, it was evident that other methods than merely speaking at the Party committees were also utilised by the Party leadership.<sup>96</sup> Those included the taking over of the party press, mass dismissal of the leading staff of Leningrad that was founded during the Zinoviev time, repressions of the activists and their exile, severe reprimands and warnings at the working places and the re-election of the regional committees.<sup>97</sup> In addition to those means, the leaders of the Left Opposition were allowed to visit Leningrad only on personal matters.<sup>98</sup> Throughout the spring of 1926 it was decided by the Party, on personal initiation of Stalin, to appoint Kirov as a secretary of the Leningrad

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<sup>93</sup> RGASPI, f.85, op.25, d. 118, l. 2-3, (16.01.1926).

<sup>94</sup> RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 131. *Letters regarding the Opposition in Leningrad between Stalin and the rest, 8.01.26-10.05.27.*

<sup>95</sup> Åsmund Egge, *Kirov-Gåten*, 2009, 36.

<sup>96</sup> Yu. Vatlina, and Paul Gregory, *Stenogrammy zasedanii Politburo CK RKP(b)-VKP(b) 1923-38*, volume 1 1923-26, 2007, 655.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 693.

<sup>98</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov. Mify i realnost*, 2001, 122.

party committee instead of Zinoviev. Stalin's personal choice of Kirov demonstrated his confidence in Kirov's candidacy for the post of regional party boss.

### STALIN'S CHOICE

It was not a casual matter that Kirov was chosen to take over Zinoviev's role in Leningrad. Stalin generally seemed to give considerate thought to administrative matters. Regional leadership occupied an important role in the administration of the Soviet Union. Its main responsibilities were to advocate central resolutions in the regions, define further provincial developments in line with central policies and watch the implementation of central resolutions. The main threat to defining the "correct" line could therefore originate from the personal vacillations and political preferences of the leaders, as occurred in the case of Zinoviev. Therefore, Stalin needed the officials who would not only understand central directives, but also regard them as their own.<sup>99</sup> Kirov was known as a Bolshevik loyal to the general line of the party after the October Revolution. Out of the characterisations sent to the CC by the Baku workers in 1925, it is seen that Kirov was highly respected in Azerbaijan. That portrayal revealed Kirov as a talented administrator and a responsible politician:

Kirov is able to adjust himself quickly to complicated political situations. He is a counterbalanced worker with great political tactfulness. He is consistent and self-controlled. He is very persistent regarding implementation of the resolutions, especially of the higher party bodies. He is able to choose workers in all areas of work and to supervise them. Special advantage is that he is the first class and magnificent orator.<sup>100</sup>

Kirov's friend Ordzhonikidze wrote a letter to Leningrad in the early 1926 noting that, 'Kirov was the right candidate for the task and that he would most smoothly restore the unity in Leningrad'.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, Stalin was personally acquainted with Kirov and had a very friendly relationship with him. Stalin needed a loyal follower in Leningrad. In order to avoid influence from the Zinovievites, Stalin required a person who did not have any connections either with the Leningrad Party staff or with the Leningrad proletariat.<sup>102</sup> Due to the remote position in Azerbaijan Kirov did not have any close connections with Leningrad and he had been to Leningrad only four times throughout his political career.<sup>103</sup> Stalin's personal choice of Kirov and his entrustment in leading such an important Party organisation as Leningrad demonstrates Stalin's confidence in Kirov. Stalin showed his support of Kirov by visiting him several times in Leningrad.

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<sup>99</sup> Lars T. Lih, Oleg V. Naumov and Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *Stalin's Letters to Molotov 1925-1936*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 10.

<sup>100</sup> A.A. Kirilina, U.A. Lipinin, *Kirov i leningradskie kommunisty 1926-1934*, (Lenizdat 1986), 11.

<sup>101</sup> RGASPI f.80, op. 9, d. 37, l. 1. *Letters addressed personally to S. Kirov*.

<sup>102</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov. Mify i realnost*, 2001, 104.

<sup>103</sup> Alla Kirilina, "Kirov – izvestny i neizvestny" in *Avrora* Nr.10, 1989, 6.

**TRANSFER TO LENINGRAD**

Kirov's private correspondence in 1925 and 1926 with his wife Maria Lvovna and his friend Ordzhonikidze, who like Kirov also stood close to Stalin, can reveal Kirov's attitude towards his transfer to Leningrad as well as his thoughts about the conflict in the party. The letters addressed to Maria Lvovna implied that Kirov did not only wish to move to Leningrad, but also tried to prevent his permanent transfer there, but it was of no avail:

They are transferring me from Baku to Leningrad, where an unbelievable squabble is going on... I tried everything to resist it, but nothing helped. My mood is awful. I have never felt so badly.<sup>104</sup>

In accordance with the party discipline principle the decision of the CC had to be unconditionally followed by the Bolsheviks. By discipline the Bolsheviks basically meant obedience to higher decisions. Decisions of party centres were binding on all members.<sup>105</sup> Since the underground years the party members followed the expression that those 'who were not with them were against them'. Therefore Kirov had to admit his promotion in Leningrad despite his personal wishes to stay in Baku. In his letters to his wife Kirov appeared insecure and frustrated about his transfer to Leningrad where he did not have any acquaintances. In the beginning of 1926, he wrote to his wife that, 'he did not wish to move to the terrible state of affairs in Leningrad'.<sup>106</sup> Although Kirov condemned the Opposition's position in 1925, from his personal letters to his wife it was obvious that he disliked the situation that was happening in Leningrad:

During the Congress Sergo [Ordzhonikidze] and I were sent there [Leningrad] with reports, the situation was unbearable... Dear Marusia, how difficult it is to admit that I am going to an awful situation in Petersburg.<sup>107</sup>

From Kirov's reaction towards transfer to Leningrad, it is clear that he did not have personal ambitions to be promoted to the central position in the Communist party. Nevertheless, one should probably not exaggerate Kirov's negative reaction to his promotion. Although Kirov was known for his tolerance, it seems like his reluctance towards moving to Leningrad did not lie in his political patience towards Zinoviev, but rather his personal preference to proceed with the unfinished work in Azerbaijan rather than being in the centre of a profound political quarrel. From the correspondence preserved in the RGASPI, it is evident that Kirov was very close to the Baku Bolsheviks and thought that it was unnecessary to transfer him from

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<sup>104</sup> RGASPI f. 80, op. 26, d. 55, l. 1, (4.01.1926).

<sup>105</sup> Graeme Gill, *The Origins of the Stalinist Political System*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 100.

<sup>106</sup> RGASPI f.80, op. 26, d. 55, l. 2.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 1.

Baku.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, Kirov was a rather disciplined person, therefore moving to Leningrad was a great responsibility for him. After moving to Leningrad he wrote to his wife, ‘The state of affairs here is very complicated, there is work for twenty-four hours. I am not sure how it will develop. Anyway I feel terrible. The task is very responsible’.<sup>109</sup> He realised that working there would have placed him in the centre of all the intrigues and Kirov seemed to be unsure whether he would manage with the given task: ‘I have no certainty that I will manage to hold out there [Leningrad]’.<sup>110</sup>

Kirov’s negative reaction towards his work in Leningrad may also be explained by hostility towards him by the local party members. He wrote in his letters to his wife and Ordzhonikidze about CC members generally being met with hostility in Leningrad.<sup>111</sup> The Zinovievites spread information about Kirov’s past saying that he was writing for a liberal newspaper before the Revolution and was not a significant figure in the Party.<sup>112</sup> Therefore Kirov was considered an outsider by the Leningrad Bolsheviks. As mentioned by Kirov’s Soviet biographer, Krasnikov, the Leningrad Bolsheviks had been used to stand close to Lenin himself, whereas Kirov was provincial and relatively unknown in Leningrad.<sup>113</sup>

In Kirov’s personal correspondences there is no direct statement about the Opposition or Zinoviev. There is more information about his work in Leningrad in general. Amy Knight claimed that in one of his letters to Maria Lvovna, Kirov implied that “he was against of forcing the Zinovievites out of the party. He wanted to put the question to a democratic vote.”<sup>114</sup> It is unfortunate that Knight did not refer to the letter she used as an evidence for Kirov’s tolerance towards the Zinovievites. From the analysed letters there is no inclination towards that claim. Since Knight referred to the same letters from the RGASPI, the argument about Kirov’s wish to put to a democratic vote is questionable.

## KIROV AND THE UNITED OPPOSITION

The factional conflicts within the Soviet Communist party did not cease with the Zinoviev’s removal from Leningrad. Despite the pressure on Zinoviev and Kamenev to admit the resolutions of the Fourteenth Congress and its policies, they did not obey to join the CC and Stalin majority. Instead, at the plenary session of the CC in July 1926, regardless of the

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<sup>108</sup> RGASPI, f. 80, op. 10, d.34, *Letters addressed personally to S. Kirov*.

<sup>109</sup> RGASPI f. 80, op. 26, d. 56, l.1, (7.01.1926).

<sup>110</sup> Alla Kirilina, “Kirov – izvestny i neizvestny” in *Avrora* Nr.10, 1989, 7.

<sup>111</sup> RGASPI f. 80, op. 26, d. 56, l. 1 (7.01.1926) and RGASPI f. 85 op. 25 d. 118, l. 1.

<sup>112</sup> S.V. Krasnikov, *Kirov v Leningrade*, 1966, 20.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Amy Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin’s Greatest Mystery*, 1999, 115.



differences in the political outlooks, they joined against the Stalin's grouping with Trotsky and the rest of the smaller oppositional groupings, known as the United Opposition. Among other demands the faction asked for greater freedom for discussion within the Party and less bureaucracy. By October 1926, with Trotsky at its head, the United Opposition was eventually accused by the Stalin majority of violation of party principles by engaging in the illegal factional activities and the organisation of a separate party.<sup>115</sup> As a result of a lengthy struggle between Stalin's majority and the United Opposition proceeding throughout 1926 and 1927, Trotsky and Zinoviev were expelled from the Party at the Fifteenth Congress that was held in December 1927.

As in the case with the Left Opposition, Kirov loyally supported the resolutions of the CC and the overall developments that were happening at the top level of the Communist Party. Like the rest of the members of the Stalinist grouping, Kirov's speeches delivered at the CC meetings and at the regional meetings in Leningrad revealed his discrepancy with the Opposition's views. He devotedly condemned the Opposition's factional activities.

Regarding the dissertation's main theme of Kirov's position towards the Oppositionists it is especially interesting to discuss his role at the plenary session of the CC in October 1926. At that session Kirov and the Leningrad delegation initiated the question of expulsion of Trotsky from the Politburo, Kamenev as the candidate to membership in the Politburo and Zinoviev as the chairman of the Comintern.<sup>116</sup> This fact is often used by historians to prove Kirov's unconditional devotion to Stalin's principles. From Kirov's speeches, it may in fact seem that his position was not different from the Stalinists' in 1926. Like Molotov and Stalin, Kirov also accused the United Opposition in the establishment of a separate party, concluding that the Opposition had all the necessary elements for leading a parallel organisation, such as illegal publication, illegal presses, regular illegal meetings that occurred parallel to the CC meetings which were necessary to establish a new party.<sup>117</sup> Additionally, like Stalin, Kirov constantly emphasised the need for harsher party discipline and the strengthening of the party unity.<sup>118</sup>

It must be considered as to what kind of position Stalin occupied in relation to the Opposition in October when Kirov initiated the proposal of their possible dismissal. At the Politburo meeting in October 1926, Stalin noted that the Opposition was defeated and the next question

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<sup>115</sup> J. Stalin *Sochineniia*. Volume 8, 1925. (Moscow: OGIZ, 1949), 220-221.

<sup>116</sup> S.M. Kirov, *Izbrannye stati i rechi*, (Samizdat, 1937), 174.

<sup>117</sup> S.M. Kirov, *Stati, rechi, dokumenty*, (Partizdat, 1936), 221.

<sup>118</sup> RGASPI, f. 80, op. 10, d. 10, l. 4 (09.11.1926).

raised was whether the Oppositional leaders could keep their membership in the CC. He concluded that the CC had no intention of expelling its members and the opposition could keep its membership on certain conditions, such as admitting to their faulty position and dismissal of the faction.<sup>119</sup> It is therefore seen that Kirov's position at the plenary session was even harsher in some way comparing to the one of Stalin at that time. However, it should be noted that Stalin publically seemed to give an impression of a 'moderator', like at the Fourteenth Congress when he was kind of an arbiter between Zinoviev and Bukharin. Stalin publically seemed to avoid initiating such serious proposals as excluding members, for example. From Stalin's letter to Molotov, dated 25 June 1926 it may be claimed that the decisions about the Opposition leaders were decided before the plenary session. In that letter Stalin presented his views about the Zinoviev's group, instructed his closest comrades about the future actions against the Opposition and suggested that, 'the blow must be struck precisely against this group [the Zinoviev's group] at the *plenum*'.<sup>120</sup>

Stalin's recommendations were seemed to be followed by his political friends. Trotsky, for example, complained between 1923 and 1925 that key decisions were taken prior to formal Politburo meetings. In the struggle with the United Opposition, Stalin relied on a leading group to prepare the Politburo sessions in advance.<sup>121</sup> As Molotov remembered, important decisions and votes of the Politburo were always prepared in advance by a smaller group: "There was always the leading team in the Politburo ... all issues of prime importance were first addressed by the Politburo's leading group. That tradition started under Lenin."<sup>122</sup>

Nevertheless, there is no factual proof that Kirov had instructions from the centre to put forward the proposition about the expulsion of the leaders of the United Opposition at the *plenum*. One should not, however, exclude the fact that his decision could be influenced by what was happening in the internal circles of the Bolshevik Party. Moreover, by the autumn of 1926 Kirov had acquired more popularity within the Bolshevik Party and the Leningrad organisation. However, since Leningrad was in the middle of the political struggle at the Fourteenth Congress and its support of the CC's life was questionable, it was necessary for Kirov to demonstrate that Leningrad supported the CC's majority loyally and fully regarding

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<sup>119</sup> J. Stalin *Sochineniia*. Volume 8, 1926. (Moscow: OGIZ, 1947), 212.

<sup>120</sup> Lars T. Lih, Oleg V. Naumov and Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *Stalin's Letters to Molotov 1925-1936*, 1995, 115.

<sup>121</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition 1926-27*, (New York, 1975), 75 cited from E.A. Rees "Stalin as Leader 1924-37". In E.A. Rees, *The Nature of Stalin's Dictatorship. The Politburo 1924-1953*. 2004, 24.

<sup>122</sup> J. Arch Getty, "Stalin as Prime Minister: Power and the Politburo". In Sarah Davies and James Harris, *Stalin. A New History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 85.

their campaign against the United Opposition. Hence the proposal of the expulsion was a means of showing full support to Stalin's majority.

In my opinion, Kirov's position at the October plenum should be discussed in relation to the totality of his speeches, especially those delivered later in 1927 and directly regarding the expulsion of the oppositionist leaders from the CC and the party. In my opinion, Kirov's role at the October plenum is often exaggerated, especially of those who wish to prove that Kirov's position towards the Oppositionists was as harsh as that of Stalin.

The question of Trotsky's and Zinoviev's expulsion from the CC came up at the June CC plenum in 1927 where the votes of the Communists were evenly divided. Some members, like Ordzhonikidze for example, thought that the question should not be decided until the Fifteenth Party Congress. Stalin, who was out of town, protested against expulsion.<sup>123</sup> On 20 June 1927, a bare majority voted to expel Trotsky and Zinoviev. From the speech delivered in Leningrad about the results of that *plenum*, Kirov's reaction seemed to be closer to that of his friend Ordzhonikidze. He wrote that despite the fact that the Leningrad delegation was the one demanding the expulsion of Trotsky from the CC earlier, meaning the October plenum of 1926, the situation was more complicated than it seemed.<sup>124</sup> Kirov noted that although there were times when the Bolsheviks were provoked by the speeches of the Opposition and wanted to exclude the leaders right away, after considerate thought they came to a different conclusion.<sup>125</sup> Kirov claimed that the expulsion of Zinoviev and Trotsky would not decide the entire problem of the establishment of a "second" party. Therefore it was more important to persuade the supporters of the Opposition of the incorrectness of the views of the oppositionists than just expelling the leaders.<sup>126</sup> Using Kirov's words, 'it is easier to deal a blow and believe that there will be silence'<sup>127</sup> and 'If we throw them out, everybody should understand why and it is more complicated. Hence other means should be implied than exclusion'.<sup>128</sup> From the speeches Kirov appeared rather tolerant towards the Oppositionists, trying to see himself in their places. He noted that, "It was common knowledge that everyone in the party would do that without saying, that if he should have been forced to swear he would have smacked their heads."<sup>129</sup> He also said that, "in every family there is at least one black sheep, the party should not be ashamed of having only ninety six members who voted

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<sup>123</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 3.

<sup>124</sup> RGASPI f. 80, op. 11, d. 28 l. 43, (10.08.1927).

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 49.

against the resolutions at the Fifteenth Conference.”<sup>130</sup> Meaning that, ninety six members was relatively modest number. He added that there were still means by which to cure those members. Even though Kirov did not note which exactly means should be employed, he probably implied the means of persuasion, since he noted that from his own experience in Leningrad anyone could be persuaded.<sup>131</sup>

His expressions may be interpreted due to his tolerance towards the Oppositional leaders, but this is due to the deeper understanding of the consequences of the expulsion of the Oppositional leaders. Kirov assigned a greater role to winning over common members of the Party by explaining the differences of political outlooks than simply enforcing the CC's will. As a result of the demonstration that was arranged by the United Opposition in November, the Fifteenth Congress, which was held in December 1927, approved the resolution of the CC, dated November 11, to exclude Trotsky and Zinoviev from the Communist Party. Due to the demonstration, the United Opposition was accused of taking the internal conflict out into the public. Political conflicts must be contained within party bounds.<sup>132</sup> At the Fifteenth Congress Stalin noted that either the opposition accepted their condition of entire dismissal of their faction, or they should leave the party, and if they do not leave they would be excluded.<sup>133</sup>

Kirov's statement at the Fifteenth Congress conveyed that he supported fully the Stalinist faction in the exclusion of the Opposition from the party. He claimed that the Opposition leaders could have been expelled even sooner if Lenin was alive.<sup>134</sup> He concluded his speech saying that the Opposition should be decidedly and mercilessly excluded from the party.<sup>135</sup> Despite his statements earlier in 1927, it seems that Kirov genuinely believed in the wrong position of the Opposition by the end of 1927.

## CONCLUSION

Kirov loyally followed the party's resolutions and decisions in Leningrad in the political campaign against Oppositionists. His political vision was totally in line with the majority of the Politburo. He supported the continuation of the NEP provided by Bukharin and Stalin and condemned behaviour of the Oppositionists. On one occasion he even suggested the expulsion of Oppositionists from the Party. During his first years as a regional party chief in Leningrad,

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<sup>130</sup> S.M. Kirov, *Izbrannye stati i rechi*, (Samizdat, 1944), 55.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>132</sup> Graeme Gill, *The Origins of the Stalinist Political System*, 1990.99.

<sup>133</sup> *XV Sjezd VKP(b) Stenograficheskii otchet*, 1928, 82.

<sup>134</sup> S.M. Kirov, *Stati i rechi*, 1957, 481.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 488.

Kirov proved himself as a reliable associate of Stalin and his supporters. As a result he was appointed as a candidate member of the Politburo in the summer of 1927. Despite his personal reluctance to transfer to Leningrad and the hostility with which Kirov was met there, Kirov gradually strengthened his authority in Leningrad and was accepted by the local Bolsheviks. The Oppositionists were driven out of Leningrad and Leningrad proved to be loyal to the CC's line. Generally, it may be concluded that from his work in Leningrad, Kirov appeared as a talented and responsible politician, who was dutiful and loyally followed the general line, which automatically became his own line.

## CHAPTER 4: STALIN'S REVOLUTION FROM ABOVE

### THE RIGHT DEVIATION, INDUSTRIALISATION AND COLLECTIVISATION

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#### INTRODUCTION

Starting in 1928, Stalin and his supporters initiated a new set of policies based on comprehensive collectivisation of peasants and accelerated industrialisation. Stalin's revolution from above, as it is also otherwise known, saw the shift of the general policies caused further disagreements within the Soviet leadership. This time the conflict occurred between Stalin and his clique on the one hand and Stalin's earlier allies, the Rightists typified by Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky, on the other. Since Kirov agreed with Stalin and the Rightists in their approval of the NEP and gradualist approach to economic development earlier, the question is which faction did he choose to support? This chapter will examine Kirov's position towards Stalin's policies of collectivisation and industrialisation in the period from 1927 until 1931. The main question is whether Kirov loyally supported Stalin's initiatives throughout the period or whether he demonstrated some reservation to the new strategy.

#### NEW POLICIES, NEW FACTIONAL STRUGGLES

From 1928, Stalin and his associates launched a series of reforms that gradually caused the abolition of Lenin's NEP. Despite the NEP's positive results, such as civil peace, political stability and economic recovery, the NEP had caused the growth of a new class of independent producers, who were relatively better-off peasants, known as the *kulaks*. Being a private trader, the *kulak* wished to sell his grain surplus privately rather than voluntarily submitting it to the state. The retaining of the grain led to a serious procurement crisis in the countryside and caused a lack of food in the cities and the army in the of late 1927 to the beginning of 1928. Hence, the main aim of the state was to establish control over food production in the countryside.

As a solution to the procurement crisis Stalin and his followers introduced the so-called "emergency measures", *chrezvichainie mery*. These measures included such policies as the forced expropriation of grain from peasants, ultimately forced collectivisation, the joining into collective farms, *kolkhoz*, and dekulakisation, *raskulachivanie*, the liquidation of peasants' property. Stalin and his loyal followers insisted on the extension of the forced collectivisation of the peasants and higher pace for industrialisation. On the other hand, Bukharin and his

supporters, Rykov and Tomsy, demanded a retreat from the emergency course regardless of the economic and political consequences and continuation of the NEP measures. At the meeting of the CC in January 1929, Stalin's opponents were accused of factionalism and were labelled as Right deviationists. The question is whether Kirov and other Party members unconditionally supported Stalin in his campaign against the Bukharinites as they did in the fight against the Leftists, taking into consideration that it was Stalin who actually opposed the General Line of the Party at this time.

### **KIROV, A WAVERER?**

The gap between speeches in the official collections of Kirov's speeches imply that Kirov seemed to be rather reserved towards criticism of the Right deviation in his official statements in 1928 and 1929. Kirov's restrained position towards the Rightists, alongside with the lack of his publications, have raised doubts among scholars about his unconditional support of Stalin in his campaign against the opponents. Conquest concluded that in the campaign against the Right deviation 'Kirov never showed the animus of the true Stalinist'.<sup>136</sup> Scholars tended to interpret Kirov's reserved position towards Bukharin and the Right deviation as original signs of unfaithfulness to Stalin and his policies.

There are several factors that can clarify Kirov's reserved position towards the Right wing rather than his personal sympathies with the Rightist ideology. First, it should be noted that originally there were no overall significant disagreements over the introduction of the "emergency measures" within the Communist Party. Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsy originally supported the selective confiscation of grain from the peasants as a short-term necessity.<sup>137</sup> Moreover, selective confiscation of grain did not originally seem to signify the abolition of the NEP as such. Even Stalin himself denied NEP's abolishment in one of his speeches about the first results of the procurement campaign in 1928: "The talk to the effect that we are abolishing NEP, that we are introducing the surplus-appropriation system, *dekulakisation* is counter-revolutionary chatter that must be combated."<sup>138</sup> As a result the party members could assume that the "emergency measures" were temporary and necessary means to halt a grain crisis, and so did not oppose Stalin's initiatives in the countryside. It can therefore be suggested that the lack of record of the Right deviation in Kirov's public statements in 1928 can be explained by the lack of public division between the Stalin group versus Bukharin's.

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<sup>136</sup> Robert Conquest, *Stalin and the Kirov Murder*, 1989, 20.

<sup>137</sup> Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution. A Political Biography 1888-1938*. (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1973), 278.

<sup>138</sup> J. Stalin, *Works*, volume 11, (Moscow, 1954), 18.

Even when Stalin's policies became more extensive in the countryside and the differences in opinion between the two factions became more profound, officially both factions denied each other's existence from 1928 to 1929. Formally the Party seemed to appear unified. Public debate was conducted in the so-called "Aesopian" or undercurrent language.<sup>139</sup> The analysis of Stalin's speeches imply that Stalin himself did not criticise the Right deviationists in public in 1928 and early 1929. He acted carefully, publicly supporting unity in the party.<sup>140</sup> As in the case with the Left Opposition from his official statements, Stalin appeared in the role of an advocate and moderator rather than a prosecutor. Therefore, the Party's wish to limit factional tensions to the internal discussion may explain Kirov's official restrained position towards the Right deviationists in the late 1920s.

The gap in official statements, however, did not necessarily mean that the struggle over power inside the Stalin-Bukharin leadership was unknown in wider party circles.<sup>141</sup> As the leader of such an important centre as Leningrad and a close friend of Sergo Ordzhonikidze, who was in the centre of then current political intrigues, Kirov was aware of the ongoing tensions in the top level of the party. From the letter to Maria Lvovna, dated 17 July 1928, it is known that Stalin visited Leningrad after the July *plenum* in 1928 when the Right opposition had been reduced to a minority status. Kirov wrote in July 1928 to his wife, "Dear Marusia, [...] things are not working out very well. But it is useless to talk about it. Stalin was here with me for two or three days. The day before yesterday he left."<sup>142</sup> It may be suggested that Kirov acquired information about the strife between Stalin and his Right opponents at first hand. Unfortunately, Kirov's private letters do not reveal his personal attitude towards the Rightists in 1928. Kirov seemed rather reserved and precautionary in expressing his views in the letters. Kirov's letter to Ordzhonikidze that was sent the same day as the letter to Maria Lvovna in July 1928, did not include more information about the political strife either: "You have already been told about the *plenum*. After the *plenum* Stalin was here in Leningrad... Things are generally in order... [I will tell you] about the rest when we meet, which I hope will be soon".<sup>143</sup> Personal correspondence between Kirov and Ordzhonikidze does not directly convey Kirov's view of the Rightists, but they indicate the ongoing discussions of the current situation privately. The lack of Kirov's private thoughts about the campaign against the Rightists has left space for speculations by historians.

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<sup>139</sup> Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution. A Political Biography 1888-1938*. 1973, 277.

<sup>140</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*. 2009, 7.

<sup>141</sup> Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution. A Political Biography 1888-1938*, 1973, 277.

<sup>142</sup> RGASPI f. 80, op. 26, d. 60, l.1, (17.07.1926).

<sup>143</sup> RGASPI f.85, op.25, d.125, l.1-2, translated as in Amy Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery*, New York 1999:127.



It seems to me that Kirov's reserved position towards the Rightists was dictated by a generally unclear situation within the Party. Not only Kirov, but some other high-ranking Communists did not know how to relate to the conflict in the top and to decide whose side to choose. The Rightists had good personal relationships with many members of the Politburo, with whom they had shared years of merciless struggle against a common enemy, the Trotsky-Zinoviev opposition.<sup>144</sup> Hence, one of the factors that distinguished the campaign against the Rightists from the one against the Leftists was that even Stalin's supporters did not view the Bukharin group the same way they had viewed previous opposition forces, such as Trotsky and Zinoviev. The Rightists were not viewed as an organized opposition group that is why they were labelled as a deviation. Moreover, they were less inflexible than the Leftists and tried to act within the party framework of party legality by not making categorical demands about Politburo staffing changes.<sup>145</sup> Even during the bitter conflict, Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky tended to be viewed as "one of us". This fact may illustrate both the cautious positions of the Politburo members towards the Bukharin group as well as their sympathies towards it. Kirov was among those who managed to preserve friendly relations with the Right leaders. In Kirov's file at the RGASPI archive, there are personal notes written with pencil about the Right opposition most likely dating from 1929. Despite the bad quality of the document, the information in the source indicates that Kirov disliked the conflict with the Rightists, "About factionalism. Did not exist. Maybe the correct opposition. Hidden struggle in the party. I have to fight Tomsky and vice versa?"<sup>146</sup>

Personal correspondence between Kirov and Bukharin indicates generally warm and friendly relationship between the two Bolsheviks. They were not as close as Kirov and Ordzhonikidze for instance, but the letters reveal the fact that Kirov highly respected Bukharin. There is a variety of messages in the correspondence between them, such as general mundane matters and sharing of opinions about books and magazines.<sup>147</sup> Other than personal matters, there is no assessment of either Stalin, or of the political situation in the Soviet Union. Aside from the existing letters, it is a known fact that whenever Bukharin was in Leningrad he preferred to stay at the Kirov's flat.<sup>148</sup> Bukharin's reminiscences that are kept at the President archive in Russia imply that even when Bukharin was in Stalin's disfavour in the 1930s he kept a close relationship with Kirov: "When I was in disfavour... and fell ill in Leningrad, Kirov came to me, spent the entire day, muffled me up and sent me to Moscow with such affectionate

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<sup>144</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*. 2009, 5.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> RGASPI f.80, op.12, d.13, l. 1-6.

<sup>147</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov. Mify i realnost*, 2001, 189.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

care.”<sup>149</sup> In one of the recollections found by Kirilina in Kirov’s museum in St. Petersburg, it is noted that Kirov never believed that Bukharin was a deviator and worried every time they had disagreements.<sup>150</sup> Therefore it is understandable that Kirov was frustrated by the fact that he had to fight those he actually highly valued personally. As a result, Kirov’s reserved attitude towards the Right wing leaders could be explained by the good personal relationship with Bukharin. However, friendly relationship with Bukharin did not necessarily place Kirov on the same side with Bukharin politically. This fact will be analysed in the discussion of Kirov’s economic points of view.

As previously mentioned, Kirov’s good relationship with the Right leaders did not distinguish itself among other high-ranking Communists. Ordzhonikidze, Voroshilov and Kalinin were also careful regarding their statements towards Bukharin and the Rightists in the end of the 1920s.<sup>151</sup> It has been agreed upon that despite Ordzhonikidze’s close relationship with Stalin, his attitude towards the Rightists was rather conciliatory in nature towards the end of the twenties. The question is whether Kirov’s association with Ordzhonikidze may imply of a similar wavering position towards the Rightists.

From analysing the first-hand sources, such as letters and his official statements, it seems that Ordzhonikidze’s position as a vacillator is sometimes exaggerated. On the one hand, in a letter to Rykov in November 1928, Ordzhonikidze really tried to reconcile Stalin with the Rightists:

I am begging you to try to reconcile Bukharin and Stalin [...] It is ridiculous, of course, to talk about replacing you, or Bukharin, or Tomsy. That would be crazy. It appears that the relationship between Stalin and Bukharin has significantly deteriorated, but we have to do everything we can to reconcile them. In general, Aleksei, we have to be incredibly careful in dealing with any issues that could trigger a fistfight. The greatest restraint is needed to keep a fight from breaking out.<sup>152</sup>

Like Kirov, Ordzhonikidze was also frustrated by the internal party disagreements. Ordzhonikidze’s motive in reconciling with the Rightists was to preserve the status quo in the Politburo and to avoid further conflicts which could undermine the Socialist order in the Soviet Union.<sup>153</sup> Besides, in the letter to Kirov on 29 July 1929 Ordzhonikidze wrote, “The

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<sup>149</sup> V.I. Kurbatov, “Ubistvo brata Stalina” in V.I. Kurbatov, *Pokushenie na vozhdai. Tainy Rossiiskoi Istorii*. 2006, 75.

<sup>150</sup> Alla Kirilina, “Kirov – izvestny i neizvestny” in *Avrora* Nr.10, 1989, 12.

<sup>151</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Politburo. Mekhanizmy politicheskoi vlasti v 1930-e gody*, (Moscow: Rosspen, 1996), 22.

<sup>152</sup> Cited as in Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle.*, 2009, 6.

<sup>153</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 6.

opposition has never failed as quickly and as disgracefully as it happened with the Right fellows. To hell with them let us not regret.”<sup>154</sup>

It is interesting that when Bukharin sought support from Kamenev and the earlier Left Opposition against Stalin in 1928, he mentioned that the Rightists originally relied on the support of Ordzhonikidze: “Ordzhonikidze is not a knight. He came to me, cursed Stalin violently, but in the decisive moment betrayed us.”<sup>155</sup> The conversation between Bukharin and Kamenev provided Stalin with a reason to accuse Bukharin and the Rightists of disloyalty to the party. As for Ordzhonikidze, he was appointed as the chairman of the special commission to decide the question of the Bukharin-Kamenev conversation, where Kirov was also a member. The appointment of Ordzhonikidze as a chairman may demonstrate the fact that the party itself did not attach significant importance to Bukharin’s statements about Ordzhonikidze. Nevertheless, it seems that Kirov could have had a rather similar position towards the Rightists to that of Ordzhonikidze. Due to his tolerant personality, Kirov might have tried to avoid further conflict within the party and preserve the existing order within the Politburo.

The antagonists in the factional conflict were officially identified during the April CC *plenum*, held in April 1929.<sup>156</sup> Stalin personally brought up the issue of the expulsion of the Rightists from their posts:

Bukharin and Tomsy must be removed from their posts and warned that in the event of the slightest attempt at insubordination to the decisions of the Central Committee, the latter will be forced to exclude both of them from the Politburo.<sup>157</sup>

Nevertheless, Kirov still seemed to be rather reserved in his position towards the Rightists. From the analysis of Kirov’s official statements after April 1929, it is evident that Kirov began to condemn the Rightist’s position openly only in September 1929. The appearance of criticism in Kirov’s official statements could be caused by an article which was published in the central newspaper *Pravda* in September 1929 criticising Kirov’s position towards the Rightists.

### ***PRAVDA*<sup>158</sup> ABOUT LENINGRAD**

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<sup>154</sup> RGASPI f. 80, op.13, d.32, l.1.

<sup>155</sup> V.P. Danilov, O.V. Khlevniuk, A.U. Vatlin, *Kak lomali NEP*, volume 4, (Moscow, 2000), 562.

<sup>156</sup> Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution. A Political Biography 1888-1938*, 1973, 277.

<sup>157</sup> J. Stalin, *Works*, volume 12, (Moscow, 1955), 113.

<sup>158</sup> Double meaning, *Pravda* was the central newspaper, the word itself means *truth* in Russian.

In a September issue of the *Pravda* in 1932, while Kirov was hunting outside Leningrad, the Leningrad organisation was criticised in a number of articles for suppression of “self-criticism”. The so-called “self-criticism campaign”, *samokritika*, had been encouraged by Moscow and Stalin, who was personally against potential oppositionists since the April *plenum* in 1928.<sup>159</sup> The allegations in the *Pravda* represented serious charges against the Leningrad government and Kirov, personally, since the aim of the self criticism campaign was to mobilise party members and the masses to reveal the “ideologically mistaken”. By ideologically mistaken it means those who were critical of the general policies. The campaign was aimed to avoid organisation of those “ideologically mistaken” into factions. Therefore the Leningrad organisation was basically accused of not following the general line, or Stalin’s policies.

In addition to the articles in the *Pravda* a group of Leningrad officials led by Georgy Desov and Konstantin Yunosov sent a letter to the Presidium of the CC where they blamed the Leningrad party organisation and Kirov personally for the containment of the self-criticism campaign and moderation towards the oppositionists. As it occurred later, Desov and Yunosov even demanded of the Moscow officials to remove Kirov from his post in Leningrad. Desov and Yunosov were experienced Bolsheviks since 1905 and did not adhere to Oppositionists. Those charges were made on the grounds of Kirov’s pre-revolutionary work for the liberal newspaper in Terek and not leading consistent enough work against the Oppositionists by hiring many specialists with the background of financiers and factory owners.<sup>160</sup> The accusations of Kirov occurred not unsubstantiated by Desov and Yunosov. Some of the Zinoviev’s followers that were exiled after the Fourteenth Party Congress were in fact allowed to return to Leningrad after accepting the general line and writing repentant letters.<sup>161</sup> However, they were allowed back to Leningrad not on Kirov’s personal initiative, but due to their re-admission into the Party in June 1928.

After reading the articles, Kirov returned to Leningrad at once and on 2 September called for the local party committee meeting. The resolution was passed saying that the commissions should investigate the charges against the Leningrad organisation. Unfortunately, there were no reports from that meeting and one cannot discuss Kirov’s reaction to the situation, but it could be assumed that he was nervous and upset about the allegations. Regardless of Kirov’s personal views of the articles, this incident is very interesting regarding the analysis of

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<sup>159</sup> J. Stalin, *Works*, volume 11, (Moscow, 1954), 30.

<sup>160</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov. Mify i realnost*, 2001, 150.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, 151.

Kirov's position towards the Rightists. As noticed by Amy Knight, Uglanov, a Moscow Secretary, who adhered to the Right faction, like Kirov was also levelled with the suppression of criticism a year earlier.<sup>162</sup> Such parallels with Uglanov and the Moscow organization do not imply that Kirov was considered to be an advocate of the Right policies, but the incident could entail Kirov's vacillating position in the conflict between the two factions. In that respect, it is interesting to discuss Stalin's position and role in the happenings in Leningrad.

Stalin was holidaying in the South when the articles appeared. He was met with the situation through the newspapers and his correspondences with his wife Nadezhda Allilueva, Molotov and Ordzhonikidze.<sup>163</sup> In one of the letters to Molotov and Ordzhonikidze on 13 September 1929 he wrote:

The article in Pravda attacking the Leningrad leadership was a grave error. Someone wanted to portray the top officials in Leningrad as opposing the correction of the shortcomings (that's not true!)... They forgot that the Leningrad organization, which represents the most reliable bulwark of the CC, is a blow to the very heart of the Central Committee...<sup>164</sup>

From Stalin's private correspondence, it may be concluded that Stalin did not seem to question Kirov's loyalty to him and he described the situation as unfair. Due to Stalin's support of Kirov during the discussion of the matter at a closed joint session of the Politburo and the Central Control Commission presidium in autumn 1929, Kirov appeared a victor from the confrontation.<sup>165</sup> Although Kirov's pre-revolutionary activities were characterised as an error, his opponents were fired from their posts in Leningrad. Therefore the party and Stalin supported Kirov in the confrontation. On the one hand, Stalin's role and reaction towards the accusations against Kirov demonstrated good relationship between Stalin and Kirov. At the same time it should be noted that Stalin's reaction could be interpreted in terms of the political game. Since Kirov was perceived as a waverer in the Party, it was important for Stalin to gain Kirov's support against the Bukharinites. By supporting Kirov in those events, Stalin acquired one more ally. Therefore Stalin simply used the circumstances in his own advantage and Kirov became dependent on Stalin.

On 9 September 1929, Kirov stated in one of his speeches in Leningrad that the Right deviation could be fought by means of broad self-criticism:

How [to fight the Right opposition]? It can be made only by means of broad and healthy proletarian self-criticism, so that the right danger will be burned out by the flames of self-criticism even in the

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<sup>162</sup> Amy Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery*, 1999, 131.

<sup>163</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov*, 2001, 153.

<sup>164</sup> Lars T. Lih, Oleg V. Naumov and Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *Stalin's Letters to Molotov 1925-1936*, 1995, 180.

<sup>165</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 110.

smallest establishments of our Party. Since it [the opposition] is only in germinal condition, this danger can be warned. To be honest, the Right danger is very seductive, not only because it looks well ideologically, but also in practice.<sup>166</sup>

Taking into consideration the events in Leningrad, it is not surprising that self-criticism was mentioned in that speech. Kirov approved of the cleansing campaign of the Party, noting that, ‘it was the greatest Party activity.’<sup>167</sup> Nonetheless, he still appeared to hold a rather reserved position towards the Rightists. For instance, he did not mention their expulsion as it was done by Stalin. He claimed that it was possible to fight the Rightists by other methods like self-criticism.

After the article in the *Pravda*, Kirov’s public statements became more critical towards the Rightists. Kirov wished to show that the Leningrad organisation was in line with the CC’s resolutions. Moreover, Bukharin, Tomsky and Rykov were officially accused of similar charges as with the Leftist leaders. These charges included the possession of a separate platform and a line different from that of the CC and forming a bloc with Trotskyites.<sup>168</sup> Therefore the criticism of the Right deviation was more open to the public in general. At the Sixteenth Party Congress held in June 1930, Kirov criticised Rightist position: “On this stage of socialist building we consider the Right deviation as the main danger. That is why we will lead even firmer struggle against the Right deviationists...We have to firmly, decisively and irreversibly finish with the Right deviation.”<sup>169</sup> At the same time, during the local meeting about the results of the Sixteenth Party Congress, Kirov argued for keeping Bukharin in the CC of the party:

It is more profitable to keep Bukharin in the CC of the party. It is a known fact that none of the Right opposition leaders represent a threat to the party. If any of them tried to arm up against the General Line, they would be brought ruthlessly down. We have decided that Bukharin is not an ordinary member of the party despite his instability. We should bustle about helping him to readjust his mistakes. If he still sustains his view we will draw appropriate conclusions at the closest *plenum*.<sup>170</sup>

Nevertheless, by the early 1930s Kirov became more open towards criticism of the Rightists. In his speeches he condemned their position as wrong and incorrect. It is, however, questionable as to whether Kirov’s restricted criticism was only due to personal sympathies with the leaders of the Right deviation or whether he also favoured their ideological strategy rather than Stalin’s.

<sup>166</sup> RGASPI f.80, op13., d.6, l.7. (7.09.1929)

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>168</sup> J. Stalin, *Works*, volume 11, (Moscow, 1954), 333.

<sup>169</sup> S.M. Kirov, *Izbrannye stati i rechi*, 1939, 359.

<sup>170</sup> RGASPI, f.80, op.14, d.7, list 85, 17.07.1930.

Stalin's fiftieth birthday in December 1929 occupied a special place in the formation of his cult of personality after the defeat of the Rightists. It was a major public event when all of Stalin's associates glorified their established leader. Like the rest of the high-ranking Communists, Kirov glorified Stalin at the local meeting in Leningrad on 17 December 1929:

It is Stalin who directly and staunchly defended the principles of Leninism in our Party. It should be said that since Stalin has taken the leading role in the Central Committee, the work of our party has undoubtedly has grown stronger. So, let our Party proceed to the victory under the leadership of this tried, stern and solid leadership.<sup>171</sup>

Although his speech was not published in the special collection of speeches, published in honour of Stalin at the end of 1929, Kirov attended the celebrations for Stalin in Moscow on 21 December.

## INDUSTRIALISATION PLAN

It has been suggested that Kirov's views on economic policy were more in tune with those of Bukharin than those of Stalin. Apparently, Kirov assessed Stalin's tempos for industrialisation of the Leningrad region as unrealistic.<sup>172</sup> The Party pursued a policy of industrialisation of the Soviet Union after the Fourteenth Party Congress, held in late 1925. In his speeches delivered in the middle of the 1920s, Kirov shared Stalin's optimism for the industrialisation. In line with the rest of the Party leadership, he suggested that industrialisation of the Soviet Union was the major way in which it could overcome its backwardness and economic dependence on capitalist states. In May 1926, he stated, 'If we do not possess highly developed industrialisation, then we should forget about Socialism.'<sup>173</sup> He also declared that, 'denying industrialisation is denying Socialism.'<sup>174</sup> Kirov was particularly enthusiastic about industrialisation of Leningrad. He argued that it was necessary to industrialise Leningrad as it represented the seventh part of all the Soviet industry and because of its dangerously strategic position.<sup>175</sup> From his early days in Leningrad, Kirov often noted Leningrad's special role in the industrialisation process of the Soviet Union: "Since we take our course towards industrialisation of our country... we should focus our attention on the main centres of heavy industry, Leningrad occupies the leading position in the Soviet Union in that respect."<sup>176</sup> Leningrad had represented historically an important industrial centre. Mechanical engineering, metal working, electro technical and chemical industries represented one of the

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<sup>171</sup> RGASPI f.80, op.13, d.37, l.3.(17.12.1929).

<sup>172</sup> Robert Conquest, *Stalin and the Kirov Murder*, 1989, 20.

<sup>173</sup> RGASPI, f.80, op. 10, d. 8, l.8, 12.05.1926.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>175</sup> RGASPI, f.80, op. 12, d.1, l.2, 28.01.1928.

<sup>176</sup> RGASPI, f.80, op. 10, d. 8, l.18, 12.05.1926

most developed branches of the Soviet industry. The Leningrad region was somewhat industrialised already during the Czarist time.<sup>177</sup> Perhaps that is why expectations from industrialisation of Leningrad were rather high. According to the directives of the first Five Year Plan the real gross output of Leningrad industry was to increase by 276 percent in the following five years.<sup>178</sup> Although Kirov favoured industrialisation in general, allegedly he was rather reserved towards the projected plan for the Leningrad region. However, no sign of opposition to the accelerated pace for industrialisation has been found in the existing archival documentation. Officially Kirov defended the intensive tempos for industrialisation:

Why do we not decrease the rate to fifteen or even twenty percent? Not only Gosplan or CC or Politburo are responsible for a twenty percent rate, but also the entire situation we are in now. We have decided not only to catch up with the capitalist countries, but to overtake them. ...High rates for industrialisation are dictated also by internal conditions. If we seriously re-equip agriculture with the basis on modern technology, it is necessary to speed up industrialisation. We cannot make a pause no matter how difficult it may be, what sacrifices are needed from the working class and peasants. We have to pursue the fastest, highest possible tempo in our conditions.<sup>179</sup>

Kirov showed, however, some frustration towards the local budget in Leningrad. In his speech in January 1928, Kirov complained that Leningrad's budget was thrice as small as during the Czarist time.<sup>180</sup> Allegedly, the industrialisation of the Leningrad region proceeded in a slower tempo than the rest of the central regions. Slower pace of industrialisation of the Leningrad region has led to the conclusions of Kirov's signs of opposition to Stalin's policies. Nevertheless, the originally slower pace of implementation of industrialisation may be explained by local difficulties of the Leningrad region, rather than conscious opposition of Kirov to Stalin's industrialisation plan.

It should be considered that different parts of the Soviet Union had different demographic structures, economic profiles, geographical and climatic conditions, as well as varying levels of facilities and services. As a result, there was a general diversity between needs and demands of different provinces.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, levels of development varied widely. Some regions were highly industrialised, whereas other provinces had barely any industry at all. This sort of variety between the regions created different economic profiles and premises for implementation of industrialisation. Leningrad was, it would seem, unprepared for its leading economic role in the Soviet Union. The economic situation of Leningrad industry was somewhat unbalanced in 1926, when Kirov became the leader of the regional party, and its

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<sup>177</sup> A.A. Kirilina, U.A. Lipinin, *Kirov i leningradskie kommunisty 1926-1934*, 1986, 130.

<sup>178</sup> Amy Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery*, 1999, 142.

<sup>179</sup> RGASPI, f.80, op. 13, d.5, l. 10. 8.05.1929.

<sup>180</sup> RGASPI, f.80, op. 12, d.1, l.2, 28.01.1928.

<sup>181</sup> Graeme Gill, *Politics in the Russian Regions*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 3.



industry was in need of specialisation and systematic renewal.<sup>182</sup> There were not enough skilled workers, technicians and engineers and the Leningrad region did not have enough local resources to finance the construction of plants.<sup>183</sup> Additionally, the city was receiving only a third of the fuel supplies necessary to run its factories.<sup>184</sup> Industrial enterprises in Leningrad were in need of metal, energy and fuel and financial support. Local circumstances could have decelerated the process of industrialisation of the Leningrad region. Nevertheless, despite local challenges towards industrialisation in 1930, Kirov noted that Leningrad industry had excelled the five year plan by increasing production by three percent more than planned.<sup>185</sup> Therefore despite its challenges the Leningrad region, like the rest of the Soviet Union, still managed to industrialise in four years rather than the projected five. The construction of the mill in nine months, apparently a world record, at the Izhora factory may be used as an example of Leningrad's attempts to keep up the pace set for Leningrad.<sup>186</sup> Kirov demonstrated himself as a loyal supporter of Stalin's industrialisation policies in the Leningrad region.

## VIEWS ON COLLECTIVISATION

Kirov's views on collectivisation were allegedly different from Stalin's. On the basis of the relatively moderate collectivisation results in the Leningrad regions, scholars conclude that Kirov opposed Stalin's collectivisation policies. It has been suggested that Kirov's views on collectivisation were closer to those of Bukharin than Stalin.<sup>187</sup> There is principally no record of Kirov's private thoughts about collectivisation in the archival documentation. In his speeches, like many other high ranking Communists, Kirov seemed to attach significant importance to finding the correct solution to the agrarian question. In one of his speeches delivered in March 1926, Kirov referred to Lenin saying that, "if we manage to find a correct solution to the peasant question, if we manage to settle right relations between the working class and peasantry, then the revolution is secured, even on the international scale."<sup>188</sup> As it has been mentioned earlier Kirov favoured Lenin's vision of the gradual and voluntary joining of peasants into collectives. Whereas Bukharin and his Right supporters insisted on the continuation of the NEP in the late 1920s, Stalin, on the other hand, advanced a more aggressive strategy in dealing with peasantry. Stalin's policies in the countryside resulted in a

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<sup>182</sup> A.A. Kirilina, U.A. Lipinin, *Kirov i leningradskie kommunisty 1926-1934*, 1986, 130.

<sup>183</sup> RGASPI, f.80, op. 12, d.1, l.3, 28.01.1928.

<sup>184</sup> Amy Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery*, 1999, 142.

<sup>185</sup> RGASPI, f.80, op.14, d. 71, l.1. not specific date only years 1930.

<sup>186</sup> R.W. Davies, *Crisis and Progress in the Soviet Economy, 1931-1933*, (Basingstoke, 1996), 22.

<sup>187</sup> V.I. Kurbatov, *Pokushenie na vozhdai*, 2006, 92.

<sup>188</sup> RGASPI f.80, op.10, d.6, l.2. 30.03.1926

forceful comprehensive collectivisation of the peasants, which caused campaigns against the relatively wealthier peasants the *kulaks*. Any resistance to the agricultural policies was attributed to “*kulak sabotage*” and was met by deportation to Siberia, arrest or execution.<sup>189</sup> As a result of the collectivisation campaign hundreds of thousands of peasant families were deprived of their land and property and the Soviet Union was plunged into a state of civil war.

When the majority of the Party supported Lenin’s NEP in the middle of the 1920s, Kirov presented himself as an unconditional supporter of the *smychka*, the peaceful union with the peasants. In the middle of the struggle against the Left Opposition in 1926, like the rest of Stalin’s supporters, Kirov implied in one of his speeches that he did not approve of using oppressive methods in dealing with wealthier peasants, the *kulaks*: “With the assistance of this union [*smychka*] and having a whole range of state levers, such as tax system, the party may bridle *kulaks* without resorting to such rude methods as dekulakisation.”<sup>190</sup> Apparently, even in the first half of 1929 Kirov still emphasised the importance of giving economic assistance to the countryside rather than using force.<sup>191</sup> Such statements contributed to conclusions about Kirov’s liberalism towards peasants.

Taken out of the general context, such statements could indicate Kirov’s temperance towards the peasants. However, not only Kirov, but Stalin and the party leadership were quite cautious in their official statements regarding collectivisation in the early 1929. It may be claimed that there was no universal agreement within the party on the regulations of collectivisation in the first half of 1929. Local leaders launched the establishment of collective farms on a mass scale officially at the end of 1929 and beginning of 1930.<sup>192</sup> For instance, similar to Kirov Ordzhonikidze was also rather cautious towards collectivisation in 1929 in his speeches: “Peasantry should be persuaded by the examples of tractor stations, *kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy*. Peasantry should be pulled to our side by means of persuasion, by teaching about the advantages of collectivised agriculture rather than individual farming.”<sup>193</sup> It is for this reason that officially not only Kirov but other Communists were careful in their statements towards the peasants. Stalin’s policy of the elimination of the *kulaks* as a class was not announced until the autumn of 1929. Even then the terms for *dekulakisation* were quite vague. The decision of the *kulak* policy was formalised as late as 30 January 1930 in a resolution entitled

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<sup>189</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 8.

<sup>190</sup> RGASPI F.80, op.10, d.2, l.55.

<sup>191</sup> Amy Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin’s Greatest Mystery*, 1999, 145.

<sup>192</sup> R.W. Davies, Oleg V. Khlevniuk, E.A. Rees, *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>193</sup> Sergo Ordzhonikidze, *Stati i rechi*, volume 2, (Moscow, 1957), 174.

“On measures for the elimination of kulak households in districts of comprehensive collectivisation”.<sup>194</sup> According to this resolution the *kulaks* were officially divided into three categories either to be shot or imprisoned, exiled to Siberia, the North, the Urals or Kazakhstan or to be used in labour colonies. The decrees that were issued in the late January caused extreme dekulakisation campaigns in the regions during the winter of 1929 to 1930. When the general line of the Party changed towards more direct aggression towards *kulaks*, Kirov, like other Stalinists, also blamed the *kulaks* for slowing down the process of building socialism in the Soviet Union.<sup>195</sup> Like other Stalinists, he also inclined that it was necessary to ‘undress the kulaks economically.’<sup>196</sup>

From January 1930 Kirov did not show any signs of “moderation” towards *kulaks* in his speeches. In January 1930 at the local Leningrad meeting, Kirov noted that, “they [the Communists] did not have any necessity to throw those kulaks in the Neva River ... however if there are needed measures of suppression of the kulaks, not only as an economic category, but physically, they did not have to be modest in anything, even sending to the Solovetsky monastery.”<sup>197</sup> This statement is in concord with the resolutions of the centre. Not only Kirov, but also other local Party secretaries expressed views on the necessity of applying sharp measures in dealing with the *kulaks*.<sup>198</sup> Moreover, in 1932 in the article published in the central newspaper the *Pravda* Kirov exclaimed that the Party’s punitive measures were too liberal:

We have to admit honestly that our punitive policy is very liberal. We have to make amendments. If we unfairly judge some embezzler, then we must understand that we are dealing with people [*liudishki*] who can adapt to any situation, they usually are very quickly released under an amnesty, and it’s as if there never was any trial. We must strengthen our punitive measures. We consider cooperative kolkhoz property as belonging to society. It seems to me that the time has arrived to raise kolkhoz and cooperatives to the level of governmental agencies and if someone is caught stealing kolkhoz or cooperative property, he should be subjected to the harshest measures. If the punishment is softened, then it should be to no fewer than ten years of imprisonment.<sup>199</sup>

In this article, Kirov revealed himself as a supporter of harsh methods. Additionally, Kirov participated in the drafting of the programme of collectivisation. The commission included the party secretaries of all the main grain regions.<sup>200</sup> Further aggressive measures upon the *kulaks* were adopted in the Politburo as a result of the propositions originated from the

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<sup>194</sup> R.W. Davies, *The Socialist Offensive. The Collectivisation of Soviet Agriculture 1929-1930*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1980), 233.

<sup>195</sup> RGASPI F.80, op.14, d.1, l.8. (10.01.1930)

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>197</sup> A special Soviet prison and labour camp, 1926-1939, which served as a prototype for the GULAG system. RGASPI F.80, op.14, d.1, l.12. (10.01.1930)

<sup>198</sup> R.W. Davies, *The Socialist Offensive. The Collectivisation of Soviet Agriculture 1929-1930*, 1980, 233.

<sup>199</sup> *Pravda* Nr. 216, 06.08.1932.

<sup>200</sup> R.W. Davies, *The Socialist Offensive. The Collectivisation of Soviet Agriculture 1929-1930*, 1980, 232.

commission members. As a member of the commission, Kirov was in fact responsible for the *dekulakisation* policy itself.

Kirov's statements were a reflection of the developments in the centre. Nevertheless, one should not ignore the fact that it was necessary for the Communist elite to maintain a unified rhetorical affirmation of power and solidarity in public.<sup>201</sup> Therefore it was not surprising that Kirov acted in total union with the party's majority. In reality, collectivisation in Leningrad allegedly proceeded slower than in other regions of the Soviet Union. For example, per 20 February 1930, seventy percent of households were collectivised in Moscow, whereas in the Leningrad region this was only twenty-eight percent.<sup>202</sup> Results of the collectivisation process in the Leningrad region presented in an internal document, labelled "secretly to Kirov", reveals the collectivisation results in Leningrad:

	1.01.1931	1.01.1932	1.01.1933	1.01.1934	1.10.1934
Number of collectivised farms	46.952	286.671	288.559	328.370	379.058
% collectivisation	6.6	45.1	45.4	54.2	65.7

**Table 1:** Collectivisation results in the Leningrad region.<sup>203</sup>

From this note, it is seen that collectivisation proceeded rather gradually. There is little differentiation between the annual results. The statistical data showed that the Leningrad province had made little progress in collectivisation by 1934. The collectivisation percentage was relatively modest. Actually, as noted in the internal report to Kirov, the Leningrad region did not entirely achieve comprehensive collectivisation by 1934.<sup>204</sup> The question is what could cause the moderate collectivisation rate in the Leningrad region? Was it due to Kirov's personal persuasions that collectivisation should happen voluntarily, or were there other factors that could influence the collectivisation pace?

Leningrad's slower performance in collectivisation could be explained by specific socio-economic factors in Leningrad. As a regional party leader of Leningrad, Kirov tried to fulfil

<sup>201</sup> J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, *The Road to Terror. Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939*, 1999, 50.

<sup>202</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov*, 2001, 187.

<sup>203</sup> RGASPI, f.80, op. 18, d.135, l. 1.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

orders initiated from the centre, but collectivisation was complicated by the specific developments in the Leningrad region. For instance, in comparison with other regions, the Leningrad region was rather heterogeneous in terms of natural conditions. There was only 11.6 percent of arable land. The rest of the territory was covered with forest and marsh. This fact complicated the use of machinery, in contrast with the North Caucasus and the Ukraine, for example. Alongside agricultural flax cultivation, stock-raising and gardening, there were also regions occupied with hunting and fishing.<sup>205</sup> Besides, almost forty-two percent of the population was occupied with seasonal work, which also complicated the collectivisation process.<sup>206</sup> The collectivisation in the Leningrad region was also challenged by the fact that the prevailing number of the peasant households belonged to poor peasants, or *bedniaki*. According to the statistics fifty-eight percent of all households in the Leningrad Province belonged to poor peasants and small farms, more than forty percent of the households belonged to middle peasants, or *seredniak*, and only two percent were the *kulak* farms. One of the main reasons for delay in collectivisation in the Leningrad region was the fact that small households did not have an opportunity to use machines and expand their production.<sup>207</sup> Poor peasants had considerable opportunities to work as *otkhodniki*, a migrant worker, and in other non agricultural activities. Therefore there was little incentive to join the *kolkhozy*.<sup>208</sup> In addition to that, the party organisations in the region were rather weak, which also complicated the collectivisation process.<sup>209</sup> Moderate rate of collectivisation was dictated by the specific factors in the Leningrad region. Kirov did not try to conceal Leningrad's modest performance in collectivisation, as seen in 1931 when he stated:

Collectivisation may be considered completed in the key grain regions. Eighty percent of the peasant farms and more than ninety percent of areas under crops have been collectivised. Even in our Leningrad region, where collectivisation proceeded under more moderate rate, than in the grain regions, the collective sector embraces more than one third of all peasant farms and forty percent of sowing. If there were only 1.4% peasant farms by 1 October 1929, then today we have already 35%.<sup>210</sup>

Stalin was also aware of Leningrad's results in collectivisation. In 1932, Kirov received two telegrams from Stalin. In the first, he demanded to fulfil collectivisation of the Leningrad region in 1932, and in the second he extended the period to the end of 1933.<sup>211</sup> Apparently, between the two telegrams Kirov persuaded Stalin to expand the period.

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<sup>205</sup> RGASPI, f.80, op. 18, d.135, l. 3.

<sup>206</sup> A.A. Kirilina, U.A. Lipinin, *Kirov i leningradskie kommunisty 1926-1934*, 1986, 205.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 204.

<sup>208</sup> R.W. Davies, *The Socialist Offensive. The Collectivisation of Soviet Agriculture 1929-1930*, 1980, 110.

<sup>209</sup> RGASPI, f.80, op. 18, d.135, l. 7.

<sup>210</sup> S.M. Kirov, *Tri boevikh zadachi*, (OGIZ, 1931), 4.

<sup>211</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov*, 2001, 187.

As in the rest of the Soviet regions, the collectivisation campaign was met with upheavals in the Leningrad countryside. In 1928, there were a registered 212 cases of peasant rebellions and during two months in 1929 there were more than one hundred riots registered.<sup>212</sup> Amy Knight claimed that the collectivisation of the Leningrad region was conducted with less ruthlessness and brute force than in other regions.<sup>213</sup> From her analysis, Kirov appeared as a “moderate” regarding the degree of terror with which the process was carried out in Leningrad. It should be noted that the drive against the *kulaks* reached its height during the winter of 1930. Statistics that were introduced in the later years do not suggest any moderation towards the kulaks in the Leningrad regions during that winter. For instance, in one of the districts, *raion*, in the Leningrad region, in only three weeks in February 1930 the percentage of collectivisation increased from 17-18% to 90-92 %.<sup>214</sup> The state terror in the area under Kirov’s authority was no less severe than in the Soviet Union overall. Perhaps the degree of terror was even more severe taking into consideration that the population of Leningrad Province in 1932 constituted 4.2 percent of the entire Soviet population, and thirty-seven thousand people were arrested in Leningrad Province, representing approximately nine percent of all the secret police agency (OGPU) arrests in the Soviet Union.<sup>215</sup> In the archival documentation, there are several examples of proposals to limit pressure on the *kulaks*. For instance, in spring 1932 Mikhail Kalinin, Chairman of the Central Executive Committee, objected the deportation of *kulaks* that had been expelled from kolkhozes.<sup>216</sup> As a result of Kalinin’s protest, the Politburo stopped the deportation of thirty-eight thousand kulak households. However, no similar objection can be found on the behalf of Kirov.

On the other hand, the implementation of the collectivisation campaign was more complex than sometimes interpreted. It is probably not exactly accurate to attribute this repression only to Kirov entirely. Kirov’s involvement in the *dekulakisation* campaign may be interpreted from two perspectives. According to the perspective from above, excessive tempos in collectivisation were set by the CC. Therefore agricultural collectivisation involved continuing central pressures on the lower level party leaders. The achievement of the goals dictated from above was of prevailing importance, despite the appearing obstacles from below.<sup>217</sup> It was for this reason that lower level party leaders were thus caught between two unrelenting forces: the opposition of dispossessed peasants from below, and the excessive

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<sup>212</sup> *Istoria kommunisticheskoi partii sovetskogo soiuza*, volume 4, (Moscow, 1970), 607 cited in A.A. Kirilina, U.A. Lipinin, *Kirov i leningradskie kommunisty 1926-1934*, 1986, 210.

<sup>213</sup> Amy Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin’s Greatest Mystery*, 1999, 145.

<sup>214</sup> A.A. Kirilina, U.A. Lipinin, *Kirov i leningradskie kommunisty 1926-1934*, 1986, 212.

<sup>215</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 66.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

<sup>217</sup> Graeme Gill, *The Origins of the Stalinist Political System*, 1990, 206.

demands for performance by the central leaders from above.<sup>218</sup> From this perspective, Kirov followed the orders dictated from the centre in Leningrad. On the other hand, Kirov was personally responsible for the terror in Leningrad as a representative of the central authorities. Local officials had become responsible for the organisation of collectivisation in their territories.<sup>219</sup>

The expropriation of the *kulaks* was unplanned, unsystematic and, at times, even chaotic. Later research has shown that the directives from the centre upon the dekulakisation were often vague and unclear. The centre did not exert control over the dekulakisation campaign in the regions. Results in the regions exceeded the initial demands from the centre due to the anarchic nature of the drive against the *kulaks*.<sup>220</sup> As a regional leader, Kirov was directly in charge of the high rates of the *kulak* victims in the Leningrad province. On the other hand, in most regions of the country, lower authorities at the *okrug* and *raion* level were allowed to set their own numerical quotas for the number of peasant households to be dekulised.<sup>221</sup> Therefore the collectivisation process was out of control due to the initiative of local leaders.

As a leader of the Leningrad region, Kirov should have been aware of the increasing statistics in the countryside during the winter of 1930 and, in case of his moderation, should have detained the process. In one of his speeches in March 1930, Kirov actually warned ‘against chasing the percentage’ and in another speech he criticised the use of repressive methods and rather preferred voluntary joining of the peasants.<sup>222</sup> Amy Knight interpreted those statements by Kirov as a sign of his opposition to the collectivisation campaign. However, Kirov’s statements appeared as a result of Stalin’s infamous speech “Dizzy with Success”, delivered in the beginning of March 1930. In that speech Stalin criticised local authorities for excessive results in collectivisation. Therefore considered in the light of Stalin’s speech, Kirov’s statements in March 1930 were not the sign of his moderation, but rather a reply to Stalin’s criticism. Despite Leningrad’s moderate results in collectivisation, there is no sign of opposition on Kirov’s behalf towards the agricultural policies.

Kirov also participated in the “passportisation” of the Soviet Union in December 1932. Everyone who did not receive a new passport, were evicted from their flats as well as the city

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<sup>218</sup> Graeme Gill, *The Origins of the Stalinist Political System*, 1990, 206.

<sup>219</sup> J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges*. 1987, 20.

<sup>220</sup> Viola Lynne, “The Campaign to Eliminate the Kulak as a Class, Winter 1929-1930”, in *Slavic Review*, Vol.45, Nr.3 Autumn, 1986, 504.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 518.

<sup>222</sup> S. Sinelnikov, *Kirov. Zhizn zamechatelnykh liudei*, 1964, 310.

within one day. One hundred thousand people, including representatives of the bourgeoisie, clergy, and officers were evicted from Leningrad.<sup>223</sup> Moreover, Kirov actively participated in the construction of the Baltic-White Sea Canal, *Belomorkanal*, which connected the White Sea with Lake Onega in Leningrad, which further connected with the Baltic Sea. The canal was constructed within twenty months using prison camp labour, at great human cost. The construction was primarily controlled by the secret police, but as the party chief of Leningrad Kirov took an active supervising role. Although there is a record that on Kirov's personal initiation for good work, the working prisoners were rewarded and sometimes even released before the scheduled time, he was aware of the harsh methods employed by the secret police.<sup>224</sup> Furthermore, Kirov seemed to attach significant importance to the construction of the canal. For instance, at the Seventeenth Party Congress held in December 1934, Kirov declared:

It [the *Belomorkanal*] was a giant construction of our epoch... It was a heroic act to build such a canal in such a short period of time...we have to render justice to our *Chekists*, [secret police officers], who directed the construction and who literally achieved a miracle.<sup>225</sup>

From this statement it is evident that Kirov was proud of the construction of the canal under his authority. Moreover, all the delegates of Seventeenth Party Congress received copies of the book *The Stalin Baltic-White Sea Canal*, which Kirov called a 'very useful book'.<sup>226</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Kirov's reserved position towards Bukharin and the Right Deviation, relatively moderate results of collectivisation of the Leningrad region, and Kirov's alleged scepticism towards the first draft of the industrialisation plan have led to conclusions that Kirov impeded the implementation of Stalin's policies. Nevertheless, it is arguable whether Kirov's ambivalence was caused by his independent position in the party, or by some other explanatory factors. It has been shown that Kirov's hesitant position towards the Rightists may be explained by a generally uncertain and complex political situation around the Rightists' position. It was not only Kirov who was reserved towards criticising the Right Opposition, but also the rest of the party members who devotedly supported Stalin. Therefore, Kirov's reserved position towards the Rightists was similar to those of the rest of the Stalinists between 1928 and 1929. As for Stalin's reforms of collectivisation, judging from Kirov's official statements throughout the Leningrad period his vision of agricultural policies, by and large, seemed to change in line

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<sup>223</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov*, 2001, 308.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>225</sup> *XVII siezd VKP(b). Stenographicheskii Otchet*, (Moscow: Partizdat, 1934), 255.

<sup>226</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov*, 2001, 130.



with the developments on top of the Communist Party. He was reserved towards collectivisation when there was general uncertainty on the top of the party leadership and he became more radical in his statements when the party advanced harsher methods. Moderate results of the collectivisation of the Leningrad region may be explained by local unfavourable conditions for collectivisation rather than Kirov's independent position towards the policy itself. Moreover, as it has been shown, the collectivisation of the Leningrad region was no less severe, perhaps even more severe, than in other regions of the Soviet Union. It may be concluded that Kirov's position in the campaign against the Rightists, as well as his role regarding Stalin's policies, reveals him as a rather cautious politician. He tried to avoid being in the centre of political struggle. Perhaps his indecisiveness and carefulness have led to conclusions about his alternative position within the Soviet leadership.

## CHAPTER 5: STALIN'S FRIEND OR FOE?

### SERGEI KIROV: LEADER OF A "MODERATE" COURSE?

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#### INTRODUCTION

There were several signs of a certain relaxation of policies by 1934 in the Soviet Union: former oppositionists were admitted back into the Party, there was a decrease in peasant deportations, and those who had been sent to labour camps in connection with collectivisation were released. The Soviet administration, furthermore, reduced the grain procurement plan in 1932 and 1933, and agreed on slower targets for the Second Five Year Plan (1933 to 1937).<sup>227</sup> There is an assumption that the sudden shift of the official policy was a result of a concealed intra-party struggle between the "moderates", allegedly represented by Kirov, and the "radicals", typified by Stalin. Kirov's popularity became so strong within the Soviet leadership and among the masses that he advanced an independent set of reforms based on relaxation of administrative pressure. It is questionable, however, whether the softening of the policies was caused by personal initiative from Kirov. His political position in the period between 1931 and 1934 may provide an answer as to whether relative relaxation of the policies in the early 1930s was initiated by him, or whether there were other factors that contributed to the shift in the official line.

#### THE RIUTIN AFFAIR

The theory that Kirov presented a new liberal course in the 1930s originated from the article entitled the 'Letter of an Old Bolshevik', written by Boris Nicolaevsky, a Menshevik in exile. The article was published anonymously abroad in the *Socialist Herald* in January 1937. In 1956 he acclaimed his authorship in another article entitled 'Murder of Kirov'. Nicolaevsky presented Kirov as an initiator of a "new line" of moderation and abolition of the terror in the early 1930s. As a head of the "moderates", represented by other regional secretaries, Kirov presumably advocated a new set of reforms based on an end of official terror and civil strife, and reconciliation with the population and with former oppositionists inside the party.<sup>228</sup> Nicolaevsky claimed that the first sign of opposition to Stalin became apparent during the discussion of the fate of an oppositionist, Martemian Riutin, in autumn 1932. He stated, "The extraordinary popularity Kirov enjoyed in wide Party circles during the last two years of his

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<sup>227</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 85.

<sup>228</sup> Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution. A Political Biography 1888-1938*, 1973, 345.

life was due to primarily to the role he had played in the Riutin's case".<sup>229</sup> Kirov's alleged central and decisive role over the fate of Riutin has been used as the primary evidence of Kirov's opposition to Stalin in the early 1930s.

The Riutin platform was one of the last attempts to oppose Stalin in the early 1930s. Martemian Riutin, an Old Bolshevik since Lenin's time and a secretary of the Moscow Party Committee, had led oppositionist activities against Stalin and his economic policies since the late 1920s. Although not officially a rightist, Riutin supported Bukharin's policies on gradual collectivisation and slower rate for industrialisation. However, unlike Bukharin, Riutin did not accept Stalin's line as the official Party policy in 1929. As a consequence, he was expelled from the Soviet Communist party in 1930, 'for an attempt for underground propagandising right opportunistic views.'<sup>230</sup> In 1931, Riutin resumed his opposition to Stalin and his economic policies even after his release from the six months' arrest for counter-revolutionary activities.

By the spring of 1932, Riutin was responsible for drafting two documents that provoked the entire leadership of the Communist Party. The two documents were represented by a seven-page appeal, entitled 'To All Members of the VKP(b)' (VKP(b) a Russian acronym for the Soviet Communist Party), and almost a two-hundred-page platform entitled 'Stalin and the Crisis of the Proletarian Dictatorship', later called the Riutin platform. In those documents, Riutin, in alliance with his supporters in the League of Marxists-Leninists, criticised not only the Stalinist regime for an economic crisis in the Soviet Union, but blamed Stalin personally. Riutin and his supporters, who were called the Marxist-Leninists, urged every party member to unite in the name of the Leninist ideas in opposition to Stalin and his policies. Since the spring of 1932, numerous copies of the Riutin platform were distributed secretly in Moscow among former oppositionists, including Zinoviev and Kamenev.<sup>231</sup> Eventually, by the autumn of 1932, Riutin and his group were arrested by the OGPU, or secret police, for counter-revolutionary activities.

It is quite unclear as to what actually happened after Riutin's arrest in 1932. Presumably the OGPU, on Stalin's behalf, demanded Riutin's execution for counter-revolutionary activities.<sup>232</sup> There is a theory that because it would have been the first time that an

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<sup>229</sup> Boris Nicolaevsky, "Murder of Kirov", in ed. Janet D. Zagoria, *Power and the Soviet Elite*, (London, 1966), 72.

<sup>230</sup> J. Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, 1999, 52.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>232</sup> Boris Nicolaevsky, "The Letter of an Old Bolshevik", in ed. J.D. Zagoria, *Power and the Soviet Elite: The Letter of an Old Bolshevik and Other Essays*, (New York, 1966), 29.

oppositionist would be given the death penalty the Riutin's case was considered further at a Politburo meeting. Allegedly, at this heated Politburo meeting in September 1932, Stalin favoured granting the OGPU's demand on Riutin's execution, whereas Kirov was possibly the first to object the request.<sup>233</sup> As a result of the possible successful attempt of Kirov to oppose Stalin, Riutin was sentenced to ten years in prison rather than execution on 11 October 1932. Other members of the Marxist-Leninist League were either exiled or, like Riutin, sentenced to prison. Kamenev and Zinoviev were expelled from the Party for the second time for not informing the party of the existence of the Riutin platform.<sup>234</sup> Kirov's supposed opposition to Stalin in the Riutin case has been used as an acknowledged fact of the existing coherent resistance to Stalin under the leadership of Kirov. However, archival documentation recently available has questioned the theory that Kirov opposed Stalin at the Politburo meeting in 1932.

There is in fact no factual record of a Politburo meeting regarding Riutin's case in 1932 in the archival documentation. It is known that Riutin's fate was discussed at the CC *plenum* on 2 October 1932 and at the Central Control Commission presidium on 9 October 1932. However, there is no sign of opposition between Kirov and Stalin at either of the meetings. Kirov's signature was absent from the resolution regarding Riutin and his followers, which was adopted through polling of Politburo members on 10 October 1932. The final decision was to expel twenty-four people connected to the distribution of the Riutin's platform "as traitors to the party and the working class who attempted to create, through underground measures [...] a bourgeois kulak organisation to restore capitalism in the USSR."<sup>235</sup> Kirov's absence was not exceptional since he generally was seldom in Moscow and at the Politburo meetings. The investigation of the archival material in the Politburo archive, Kirov archive and Stalin archive did not suggest any conflict between Kirov and Stalin over Riutin's fate.

One may, however, assume that Riutin's case was decided at a highly secretive unofficial meeting of the Politburo members. Khlevniuk, who has had access to many of the classified Politburo files, did not find any mention of the Riutin case in the special folder which contains other important top secret questions. He concluded that Riutin's case was a routine question, which was unlikely to be considered at an unofficial secret meeting without taking reports. Besides this there were no meetings where all Politburo members were gathered

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<sup>233</sup> Boris Nicolaevsky, "The Letter of an Old Bolshevik", in ed. J.D. Zagoria, *Power and the Soviet Elite: The Letter of an Old Bolshevik and Other Essays*, (New York, 1966), 30.

<sup>234</sup> J. Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, 1999, 54.

<sup>235</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 65.

together between 25 September and 23 October at Stalin's Kremlin office either.<sup>236</sup> On the basis of the available sources, it seems that the conflict between Kirov and Stalin over the Riutin's assassination is a mere mystification. The question is on what basis then Nicolaevsky concluded that Kirov played a decisive role in the Riutin case and that it was discussed at a Politburo meeting.

Nicolaevsky admitted that the information published in his articles was obtained by him in the private conversation with Bukharin, while Bukharin was staying in Paris in 1936. However, there are certain factors that question Nicolaevsky's articles as reliable sources. First, Anna Larina, Bukharin's widow who stayed with Bukharin in Paris in 1936, refuted the fact in her memoirs that Bukharin could have held any private conversations with Nicolaevsky during his stay in Paris. She noted that most of the conversations the two men had concerned official matters over the archives Bukharin needed to buy from the Mensheviks as demanded by Stalin. On the other hand, as noted by Larina herself and later by Robert Tucker on the basis of Professor Liebich's assumptions, Larina was not with Bukharin during half or more of his two month stay in Paris and could not have known about all of the meetings with Nicolaevsky.<sup>237</sup> Additionally, Bukharin could have decided not to burden his young, pregnant wife with the worrying situation at home.<sup>238</sup> However, Larina concluded that judging by Bukharin's mood and other conversations with her husband while in Paris, Bukharin could not have had conversations with a Menshevik without witnesses.

It should be noted that Bukharin was in Paris after Kirov's death when the political situation in the Soviet Union was rather tense. Stalin seemed to become more suspicious of his closest circle after Kirov's death and therefore Bukharin was careful in Paris as to not to raise any unnecessary doubts in the OGPU agents placed to follow him in Paris. For instance, Bukharin rather enthusiastically replied to Nicolaevsky on a question about the contemporary matters in the Soviet Union. Larina noticed that Nicolaevsky expected a very different response and was unprepared for that kind of enthusiasm from Bukharin.<sup>239</sup> As noted by Nicolaevsky himself, Bukharin was 'inwardly conflicted' and feared to say too much.<sup>240</sup> It is questionable whether Bukharin could have held private conversations with Nicolaevsky, a Menshevik whom he met

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<sup>236</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 66.

<sup>237</sup> Anna Larina, *This I cannot Forget*, New York, 1993: 253. Also noted by Robert C. Tucker, On the "Letter of an Old Bolshevik as an Historical Document", in *Slavic Review*, Vol.51, No.4, 1992:782.

<sup>238</sup> Robert C. Tucker, "On the "Letter of an Old Bolshevik as an Historical Document"", in *Slavic Review*, Vol.51, No.4, 1992,782.

<sup>239</sup> Anna Larina, *This I cannot Forget*, 1993, 256.

<sup>240</sup> Robert C. Tucker, "On the "Letter of an Old Bolshevik as an Historical Document"", in *Slavic Review*, Vol.51, No.4, 1992, 783.

in Paris for the first time. It seems like Nicolaevsky's account was based on his personal impression of Bukharin in Paris.

Moreover, the information he acquired from Bukharin was a matter of internal political discussions. Bukharin was excluded from the Politburo in 1929, and therefore he could not have been present at the alleged closed Politburo meeting in 1932. On the other hand, it could be claimed that Bukharin acquired information about the conflict between Kirov and Stalin from other Politburo members, like Ordzhonikidze for example. However, Larina stated that, 'He [Bukharin] was isolated and had lost personal contact with Politburo members.'<sup>241</sup> Therefore, it is questionable that Bukharin could have had knowledge about a closed session at all. The question is then why Nicolaevsky needed to publish an erroneous article and single out Kirov in opposition to Stalin.

One of the reasons for Nicolaevsky choosing Riutin's case in his article may lie in the fact that throughout the decades the Soviet Communist Party had tried to conceal the case from public view. The Riutin case did not obtain much publicity during Stalin's time, as well as in the Soviet writing later in the period between 1941 and 1988. Even professional historians in the Soviet Union did not have broad knowledge about the Riutin case.<sup>242</sup> The absence of the Riutin affair in the official Soviet history demonstrates the importance of Riutin's opposition to the Soviet leadership. Conquest noted that, for Stalin, the Riutin Platform was 'the worst embodiment of everything hostile.'<sup>243</sup> The lack of publicity in the Soviet Union could have aroused suspicions about the case abroad, and therefore resulted in widespread speculations. However, there may be other reasons for Stalin's wish to conceal the case than the conflict with Kirov over Riutin's fate. The content of the Riutin platform was a direct assault not only against the Party's policies from above, but also Stalin's closest circle, including Kirov. Riutin's platform included some dangerous truth about Stalin's regime and Stalin's clique, and that is why Stalin tried to conceal the case. Riutin wrote:

Our opportunists were also able to adapt themselves to the Stalin regime and camouflage themselves... Kirov, a member of the Politburo, is a former Kadet and editor of the Kadet newspaper in Vladikavkaz. All of these, you could say, are the pillars of the Stalinist regime. They are all the ultimate opportunists. These people adapt themselves to any regime, to any political system... Everyone knows how the attempt by Leningraders to expose Kirov as a former Kadet and editor of the

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<sup>241</sup> Anna Larina, *This I cannot Forget*, 1993, 262.

<sup>242</sup> I.B. Shishkin, "Delo Riutina", in *Voprosy Istorii* Nr.7, 1989, 39.

<sup>243</sup> Robert Conquest, *Stalin. Breaker of Nations*, 1992, 162.

Kadet newspaper in Vladikavkaz turned out. They got a punch in the mouth and were told to shut up. Stalin [...] definitely protects his own scoundrels.<sup>244</sup>

In terms of Riutin's criticism of Kirov, the Russian historian Yefimov, who presented Kirov as one of the most loyal supporters of Stalin, use Riutin's platform as an argument that Kirov was perceived as Stalin's close associate, even by Stalin's oppositionists.<sup>245</sup> The Riutin affair and Kirov's role in it provides scholars who suggest Stalin's direct involvement in the murder of Kirov, with a motive for Stalin to eliminate Kirov as a political alternative: 'Kirov's faith was decided already in 1932 due to his opposition of Riutin's assassination.'<sup>246</sup> Therefore, one may see that these scholars who have suggested Stalin's involvement in the murder of Kirov also generally claim that Kirov opposed Stalin in the Riutin case. However, those who refute Stalin's active role in the assassination of Kirov, tend to conclude that there is no documentation of a conflict between Kirov and Stalin over Riutin.

## STALIN AND OTHER CASES OF OPPOSITION

The Riutin affair was not the only case of opposition to the Stalinist regime in the early 1930s. The Syrtsov-Lominadze bloc in 1930 and the Eismont-Smirnov-Tolmachev group in 1932 are other examples of oppositional cases to Stalin's regime. Analysis of Stalin's and Kirov's positions towards other oppositionist groupings may provide answers to such questions as whether Stalin could have initiated Riutin's execution in 1932 and whether Kirov was more "moderate" than other Stalinists in treating oppositionists. Similar to the case of the Riutin affair, there are certain challenges in studying circumstances around those oppositional cases, but to a lesser degree. Analysis of Stalin's and Kirov's role may, therefore, shed some light upon their respective roles when dealing with opposition.

On the surface it could seem that Stalin reached unconditional authority within the Soviet Communist Party in 1930. He had managed to launch his policies from above in full. At the Sixteenth Party Congress held in 1930, there was no open opposition to the regime, and Stalin had created a network of loyal associates and outmanoeuvred his Left and Right opponents. On the other hand, I would claim that despite the establishment of Stalin's cult, his position was not yet entirely secured at that time. Graeme Gill also noted, "although throughout the period [1930 to 34] he [Stalin] was clearly the leading figure, his word was not law and he could not take the rest of the leadership for granted, the symbolism of collectivism still

<sup>244</sup> I.V.Kurilova, N.N.Mikhailov and V.P.Naumov, *Reabilitatsia: politicheskie protsessy 30-50-kh godov*, (Moscow, 1991), 421 translated as in Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 110.

<sup>245</sup> N.A. Yefimov, "Sergei Mironovich Kirov", in *Voprosy Istorii* Nr.11-12, 1995, 61.

<sup>246</sup> I.B. Shishkin, "Delo Riutina", in *Voprosy Istorii* Nr.7, 1989, 49.

retained some force.”<sup>247</sup> As it had appeared by the autumn of 1930, Stalin’s policy of forced collectivisation and destruction of the *kulaks* as a class plunged the entire country into chaos. As a result of Stalinist policies, there was a drastic drop in living standards, a decline in labour productivity and the collapse of the banking system.<sup>248</sup> However, although Stalin had strengthened his position within the Party by succeeding in having outmanoeuvred two of the Right leaders, Bukharin and Tomsky, another one of the Right leaders, Rykov, was still present in the Politburo. As noted by Khlevniuk, due to the crisis of policies in the early 1930s, the popularity of the Rightists rose, therefore weakening Stalin’s authority.<sup>249</sup> J. Arch Getty concluded that, “although the Party publicly celebrated the victory of their new policies, in their inner councils the Stalinist leaders felt more anxiety than confidence, and they perceived that their position was more fragile than secure”.<sup>250</sup> Therefore, Stalin’s personal power in 1930 was not as strong as it might be claimed to be. Stalin’s insecure position in the party may explain his rather cautious utterances.

Stalin’s cautious position is evident particularly in his official treatment of his earlier supporters S.I. Syrtsov and V.V. Lominadze. On 2 December 1930, S.I. Syrtsov, the head of the government of the Russian Federation, and V.V. Lominadze, the first secretary of the Transcaucasian Party Committee, were accused of organising a leftist right-wing bloc. At the Politburo meeting on 4 November 1930, Stalin’s associates demanded expulsion of both Syrtsov and Lominadze from the party, whereas, Stalin not only opposed their expulsion, but even proposed to keep them in the CC, where they would be demoted to candidate members.<sup>251</sup> In that way Stalin’s supporters held a more aggressive stance towards the Syrtsov-Lominadze group demanding their expulsion from the CC. Eventually, Smirnov and Lominadze were expelled from the CC, but not from the party. In the context of Stalin’s moderate position in the Syrtsov-Lominadze case, it was unlikely that he could have initiated the proposition to execute Riutin. Kirov’s position towards the Syrtsov-Lominadze group will be analysed later in this chapter.

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<sup>247</sup> Graeme Gill, *The Origins of the Stalinist Political System*, 1990, 246.

<sup>248</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, “Stalin, Syrtsov, Lominadze: Preparations for the “Second Great Breakthrough””, in ed. Paul R. Gregory and Norman Naimark, *The Lost Politburo Transcripts*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 80.

<sup>249</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 10.

<sup>250</sup> J. Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, 1999, 15.

<sup>251</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, “Stalin, Syrtsov, Lominadze: Preparations for the “Second Great Breakthrough””, in ed. Paul R. Gregory and Norman Naimark, *The Lost Politburo Transcripts*, 2008, 94.



On the other hand, it should be noted that the regime was not following any single consistent policy in treating the oppositionists.<sup>252</sup> It could be claimed that by the time of the appearance of Riutin's opposition in 1932, Stalin enjoyed full confidence within the Politburo. In order to terminate any attempts of opposition once and for all he could have indeed proposed the death penalty for Riutin. Since the Riutin platform also concerned many of Stalin's closest associates, he could have counted on their support for the death penalty proposal. Additionally, Stalin could have been annoyed by Riutin's earlier anti-party activities. In the autumn of 1930 Stalin wrote to Molotov regarding Riutin's activities:

With regard to Riutin, it seems to me that it's impossible to limit ourselves to expelling him from the party. When some time has passed after his expulsion, he will have to be exiled somewhere as far as possible from Moscow. This counter-revolutionary scum should be completely disarmed.<sup>253</sup>

Therefore, the Riutin platform in addition to the Syrtsov-Lominadze criticism exacerbated Stalin's patience. The execution of an oppositionist would threaten other oppositional groupings. However, I would claim that Riutin's accusations against Stalin in the Riutin platform could be used as evidence that Stalin's position was still relatively unstable in 1932. Although he had managed to expel the opposition within the leadership, there was certain discontent within the lower levels of the party. The year of 1932 was a particularly difficult one for the country. There was famine all around the Soviet Union and as a result there was a decrease in the labour productivity since the workers could not work effectively.<sup>254</sup> Criticism of Stalin personally was at a high point in 1932. The political police had been discovering Riutin-like groups in various industrial cities – even though few could have had the opportunity to read the actual Riutin Platform.<sup>255</sup> Stalin's vulnerability may be further substantiated by the Smirnov-Eismont-Tolmachev affair which took place in November 1932, just a month after the Riutin's trial.

The Anti-party Counter-revolutionary Group of Smirnov, Eismont, Tolmachev and others was interpreted by Stalin and the party leadership as a rebirth of the Right deviation of the late 1920s. All the Stalinist leaders, aware of how fragile their power still was, viewed party factionalism as the ultimate danger.<sup>256</sup> In addition to the accusations of leading factional activities, Smirnov, Eismont, Tolmachev and others were accused of an attempt to replace the leadership, in particular Stalin. An analysis of Stalin's speeches at the 27 November

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<sup>252</sup> J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges*, 1987, 20.

<sup>253</sup> Lars T. Lih, Oleg V. Naumov and Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *Stalin's Letters to Molotov 1925-1936*, 1995, 215.

<sup>254</sup> Åsmund Egge, *Kirov-Gåten*, 2009, 20.

<sup>255</sup> Charters Wynn, "The "Right Opposition" and the "Smirnov-Eismont-Tolmachev Affair"", in ed. Paul R. Gregory and Norman Naimark, *The Lost Politburo Transcripts*, 2008, 99.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

Politburo meeting show that Stalin perceived the Smirnov-Eismont-Tolmachev case as an opposition to the general line rather than hostility towards him personally. He exclaimed, "It is evident that Smirnov and the rest paid special attention to Stalin in their testimony, they suggested that Stalin should be blamed and not the general line of the Party. [...] In reality they fight not Stalin, but the Party, the general line which they consider disastrous."<sup>257</sup> Similarly Stalin toned down the criticism coming from Lominadze and Syrtsov. At the November 1930 Politburo meeting Stalin exclaimed, "I will not discuss what was said about me personally. From the documents it is evident that Lominadze and Syrtsov found it necessary to curse and scold me. It is their business, let them curse."<sup>258</sup> Direct reference to Stalin's role in the current policies and opposition of his previous allies could weaken his position. As a result, Stalin urge to tone down the significance of the oppositional grouping of Syrtsov-Lominadze and the Eismont group demonstrates his awareness of his insecure position.

Stalin seemed to be aware of increasing criticism towards him in the lower levels of the Communist Party. It is for this reason that he generally did not present himself as an initiator of radical proposals in order not to undermine his position even further. As a result of a resolution of the CC in January 1933, Eismont and Tolmachev were expelled from the party and condemned with three years of imprisonment, whereas Smirnov was merely expelled from the CC.<sup>259</sup>

Relatively mild punishment of the oppositionists in the 1930s may demonstrate the fact that Stalin was careful with using repression to his associates. A similar view has been suggested by Graeme Gill, where he claims that the limits to Stalin's power and authority could be reflected in the treatment of opposition in the early 1930s.<sup>260</sup> In the context of relatively mild treatment of other anti-party groupings, it was unlikely that Stalin could have demanded Riutin's assassination. Treatment of the oppositional groupings in the early 1930s suggest that Stalin preferred to use other methods to dealing with oppositionists, such as expulsion from the Party, dismissal from posts, exile and moral humiliation.<sup>261</sup> Harsh repression methods against possible oppositionists were used in the late 1930s. In the early 1930s, Stalin officially presented himself as a moderate leader as far as dealing with the opposition was concerned.

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<sup>257</sup> Yu. Vatlina, and Paul Gregory, *Stenogrammy zasedanii Politburo CK RKP(b) – VKP(b) 1923-1938*, volume 3 (1928-1938), 2007, 581.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>260</sup> Graeme Gill, *The Origins of the Stalinist Political System*, 1990, 250.

<sup>261</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov. Mify i realnost*, 2001, 315.

## KIROV ON OPPOSITIONISTS

In order to understand whether Kirov could oppose Stalin in the Riutin affair (if there was one), it is necessary to establish Kirov's position in other intra-party conflicts in the early 1930s. There is little known about Kirov's personal attitude towards oppositionists due to a generally limited amount of documents regarding anti-party cases of the 1930s. It is for this reason stenographic reports from the Politburo meetings represent a central source in the discussion of Kirov's role in the anti-party cases of the early 1930s.

However, one of the main challenges in understanding Kirov's actual position lies within the fact that he was seldom present at Politburo meetings in Moscow. Out of thirty-seven Politburo meetings held in 1932, Kirov was present only at nine of them.<sup>262</sup> For instance, he did not participate at the Politburo meeting regarding the question of Syrtsov and Lominadze in November 1930 when Stalin opposed Lominadze's and Syrtsov's expulsion from the party. Lominadze was a close acquaintance of both Kirov and Ordzhonikidze from their work in the Caucasus before 1926. Kirov's absence from the Politburo meetings may be interpreted in two ways. Close association with the oppositionist Lominadze and the possible knowledge of the existence of the anti-party group could have undermined Kirov's position in the party and questioned his loyalty. Therefore, one may consider Kirov's absence as an attempt to avoid questioning his role in the case. On the other hand, there could be other reasons for Kirov's absence from Moscow at that time. The Russian researcher Kirilina claimed that Kirov was away from Moscow in 1932 due to illness or holiday rather than his support of oppositionists.<sup>263</sup>

There are minor inconsistencies with Kirilina's presentation of Kirov's involvement in the anti-party cases in the early 1930s. Referring to the opis 3 in the Politburo fond, 17, case 703 in the RGASPI archive, Kirilina suggested that Kirov was neither present during the discussion of the joint Politburo nor the Central Control Committee on 27 November 1932, nor the Smirnov-Eismont-Tolmachev group.<sup>264</sup> However, according to the opis 163 in the same Politburo fond 17, case 1009, it is evident that Kirov was not only present, but also held a speech about the anti-party group of Smirnov.<sup>265</sup> This gives reason as to why it is difficult to understand exactly which Politburo meeting Kirilina was referring in the claim that Kirov was

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<sup>262</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov*, 2001, 321.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> RGASPI, f.17, op.163, d. 1009 also printed in Yu. Vatlina, and Paul Gregory, *Stenogrammy zasedanii Politburo CK RKP(b) – VKP(b) 1923-1938*, volume 3 (1928-1938), 2007, 551.

first on a vacation and then ill.<sup>266</sup> Kirov's absence could also be interpreted as an illustration that his priorities lay in the administration of the Leningrad region rather than central party politics.

Although Kirov was not present at the Syrtsov-Lominadze Politburo meeting, he was chosen to deliver reports about intra-party affairs in Transcaucasia where Lominadze was a local Party secretary. This fact may demonstrate that Kirov was considered by the Party as a loyal follower of the resolutions of the Party despite his friendship with the charged Lominadze. Kirov himself noted in a speech to the Transcaucasian committee, delivered on 18 November 1930 that, 'Friendship remains friendship, it is a good thing, acquaintance remains acquaintance, however politics comes first, our Bolshevik politics.'<sup>267</sup> His official speech implies his disappointment and dissatisfaction with Lominadze's possible opposition to the general line: "Lominadze was our fellow, one hundred percent Caucasian, we knew him from the time he began to climb the political ladder...such a good fellow... and we see how it turned out."<sup>268</sup> Kirov also referred to his personal conversations with Lominadze, where he seemed in some way to excuse him, saying, 'Lominadze got hopelessly sick, he imagined that we [the Party] have entered the period of such a crisis, from which there is no way out.'<sup>269</sup> Due to the choice of words, like "sick" and "imagine", it may appear that it was not Lominadze's personal fault, but rather bad influence. As also noted by Amy Knight, however, Kirov's speech seemed to be apologetic in some way: he generally condemned their oppositional positions in that speech and the speech delivered in Baku some days later.

Due to his cautious statements concerning Lominadze and an attempt to excuse his position, Kirov may seem to be moderate in dealing with oppositionists. Nevertheless, as it has been noted earlier, Stalin presented *himself* as a moderate in that case by opposing the expulsion of Lominadze and Syrtsov from the party. Kirov's cautious position in treating Lominadze seemed to be dictated by his personal acquaintance rather than political sympathies. Moreover, Kirov was rather aggressive in his speech about the Smirnov-Eismont-Tolmachev group, delivered in November 1932. Regarding the Rightist leaders, Tomsy in particular, Kirov exclaimed, "Your position is completely unique in this regard. If every party member should now punch an oppositionist in the snout, then you should be punching twice as hard and twice as strongly, assuming that you have really broken with your past."<sup>270</sup> Noted by

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<sup>266</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov*, 2001, 321.

<sup>267</sup> RGASPI, f.80, op.14, d.9, l.38, 18.11.1930.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>270</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 67.

Khlevniuk when editing the stenographic record, Kirov softened his wording by replacing “punch in the snout” with “punch politically.”<sup>271</sup> An analysis of the Politburo stenographic reports suggests that Kirov seemed to occupy only a secondary role in the anti-party cases of the early 1930s. His position towards oppositionists did not differentiate from the rest of the members of the Stalinist elite who, like Stalin, condemned factional positions. In that respect, it is questionable whether Kirov could be an initiator of ‘reconciliation with former oppositionists’, or, in the words of Stephen Cohen, a ‘protector of various prominent Bolsheviks from Stalin’s wrath.’<sup>272</sup>

It was suggested by Medvedev that Zinoviev and Kamenev were restored in the party in 1933 due to Kirov’s personal influence.<sup>273</sup> Zinoviev and Kamenev, leaders of the Left Opposition in 1926, were in fact admitted back into the party on the decision of the Politburo on 12 December 1933. Accessible documentation does not suggest that Kirov occupied any special role in the re-admission of the former oppositionists to the Party. Re-admission of the former oppositionists and their presence at the Seventeenth Party Congress was favourable for Stalin himself. At the Seventeenth Party Congress, former oppositionists officially accepted Stalin’s line as the only “correct” policy. Their presence at the Congress symbolised consolidation of Stalin’s personal power.<sup>274</sup> In contrast, at the Seventeenth Party Congress, Kirov mocked members of the opposition and questioned their sincerity: “What is left to do for those who were brought up the rear? They, comrades, are trying to wedge themselves in our triumph; they are trying to remain abreast, to keep up with music, to support our growth. No matter how hard they try, they cannot manage.”<sup>275</sup> For example, he commented on Bukharin’s speech at the Congress, saying figuratively, “Bukharin, for example, seems to be singing the notes, but his voice is false. I won’t say anything about Comrade Rykov or Tomsy.”<sup>276</sup> It may be considered, however, that Kirov’s hostility towards oppositionists was only public. Nonetheless, there is no other evidence of his soft treatment of oppositionists otherwise.

### KIROV’S POLITICAL OUTLOOK IN THE EARLY 1930s

Medvedev also claimed that during 1933 Kirov spoke in the Politburo several times in favour of more flexible policies and certain “liberalisation”.<sup>277</sup> It is unfortunate that Medvedev did

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<sup>271</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 282.

<sup>272</sup> Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution. A Political Biography 1888-1938*, 1973, 343.

<sup>273</sup> Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 1971, 330.

<sup>274</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 88.

<sup>275</sup> *XVII siezd VKP(b). Stenographicheskii otchet*, (Moscow: Partizdat, 1934), 253.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>277</sup> Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 1989, 330.

not refer to any specific speeches of Kirov. Overall analysis of Kirov's speeches in the first years of the 1930s has not suggested any trace of opposition to Stalin's regime. After the Sixteenth Party Congress held between 26 June and 13 July 1930 Kirov continued to advocate the Congress's resolutions, such as the completion of the Five Year Plan in four years, and further establishment of socialism in the countryside and the cities. In his speeches Kirov did not go beyond ideas presented by Stalin at that time. On the basis of the archival documentation, it seems that Kirov simply supported general changes towards moderation in the Soviet policies in 1933, rather than being a leader of the liberal course.

As mentioned earlier, as a result of Stalin's policies of accelerated industrialisation and forced collectivisation, the Soviet Union plunged into a profound economic and social crisis in the early 1930s. In addition to extensive hunger caused by the poor harvest of 1931 and pressure for grain from the state there was general stagnation in the labour productivity, increased inflation and a disrupted financial system.<sup>278</sup> There were food riots and social discontent all over the Soviet Union. The crisis reached its peak in the winter of 1932 when the famine was at its worst. There was a possibility of an imminent collapse of agriculture as well as industrialisation. According to Nicolaevsky, Kirov's line and tactics distinct from Stalin began to take shape around that time, 'Kirov's distinct position from Stalin was especially clear at the CC January *plenum* of 1933.'<sup>279</sup> However, analysis of Kirov's statements around the January *plenum* does not sustain theories of Kirov's reformist position.

First and foremost, examination of the archival documentation preserved in the RGASPI does not suggest Kirov's oppositional role at the *plenum*. Kirov was not among the central speakers at the January *Plenum*. Delegates of the *plenum* primarily discussed the results of the first Five Year Plan and further industrialisation plan. Kirov's speech about the results of the January *plenum* on 17 January 1933, delivered in Leningrad, was a reflection of Stalin's statements about the results of the first Five Year plan. In his speech Kirov declared Stalin's speech as the most important 'programme document'.<sup>280</sup> Consequently in the early 1930s, Kirov not only supported Stalin, but also had contributed to the formation of Stalin's cult of personality. It may be seen in Kirov's speeches that reference to Stalin's utterances became more frequent. He glorified Stalin personally, as well as his ideas, and proclaimed Stalin's statements as the exemplary for the rest of the Communists.

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<sup>278</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 40.

<sup>279</sup> Boris Nicolaevsky, "Murder of Kirov", in ed. Janet D. Zagoria, *Power and the Soviet Elite*, 1966, 77.

<sup>280</sup> RGASPI, f.80, op.17, d.1, 17.01.1933.

The first signs of the relaxation policies in agriculture were already present as early as May 1932, when the Soviet government reduced targets for grain procurement plan in 1932 and 1933. In the Politburo archive, there are several protocols of the Politburo meetings in 1932 and 1933 where the Leningrad delegation required more supplies from Moscow and demanded reductions in procurement plans.<sup>281</sup> However, there were similar appeals from other Politburo members, such as Yan Rudzutak, a Politburo member, in January 1932 and Stanislav Kosior, regional secretary of the Ukraine, in March 1932.<sup>282</sup> Consequently, Kirov was not the only speaker of the moderate corrections in the agricultural policies. It may be assumed that regional leaders acted in unity against the existing central policies. However, it seems that they did not act as a united oppositional grouping, but rather as individual leaders who were standing up for the interests of their own domains.<sup>283</sup> The reduction was caused by a generally difficult situation in the countryside, rather than thought-through actions from Kirov. Like other regional secretaries, Kirov also seemed to act on the basis of the interests of his region.

To a certain extent, the intensifying crisis forced the Soviet leadership to recognise the destructive results of Stalin's policies and adopt new reforms aimed at relaxation.<sup>284</sup> Besides the domestic crisis, new foreign policy factors, such as the threat from Fascist Germany and the Soviet Union's desire to conclude an anti-Fascist pact with France in 1933 also required the softening of the domestic order in the Soviet Union.<sup>285</sup> R.W. Davies noted that in the course of 1931 to 1933 there was no prolonged period of liberalisation as such, but rather periods of greater repression alternated with periods of greater relaxation.<sup>286</sup> Vacillation of the general line at this time may demonstrate that policies in the 1930s were formed in terms of "crisis pragmatism". The Soviet administration did not seem to have an organised and moderate set of reforms, but it seemed rather to initiate policies under pressure from prevailing circumstances.

It seems that Stalin himself played a significant role in the formulation of the relaxation policies in the early 1930s. As it has been demonstrated earlier in this chapter, Stalin's position in part depended on the success of his policies from above. However, as a result of

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<sup>281</sup> Amy Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery*, 1999, 165.

<sup>282</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 62.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>284</sup> R.W. Davies, *The Industrialisation of Soviet Russia 4. Crisis and Progress in the Soviet Economy, 1931-1933*, 1996, 457.

<sup>285</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 85.

<sup>286</sup> R.W. Davies, *The Industrialisation of Soviet Russia 4. Crisis and Progress in the Soviet Economy, 1931-1933*, 1996, 460.

his policies there was a deep crisis and discontent in the masses. Stalin participated in most of the specific proposals and in the ideological and propagandistic bases for changes to the general line.<sup>287</sup> For instance, together with Molotov Stalin was responsible for the reduction of repression in the countryside. In May 1933, Stalin and Molotov ordered the release of half of all camp inmates whose infractions were connected with collectivisation.<sup>288</sup> Therefore, it may be concluded that even if Kirov was an adherent of liberalisation of the 1930s, he simply supported Stalin and the relaxation that was already underway. Similar conclusions were reached by Khlevniuk, who also claimed that the only moderate course Kirov was in favour of was the one already evident.<sup>289</sup> As a result, Kirov's support of the relaxation policies in the 1930s only proves the point that he was a loyal supporter of the general line rather than representing an opposition. The question remains as to what other factors have contributed to the theory about Kirov's "moderate" leadership in the Party.

First and foremost, the archival materials reveal frequent conflicts between the Moscow and the Leningrad administration. Traditionally historians tended to interpret conflicts between these two administrations in terms of Kirov's independent position within the Soviet Party and his wish for a new liberal course. However, from the analysis of the documents it seems that conflicts between Leningrad and Moscow have been, at times, exaggerated. In those conflicts, Kirov seemed to act as a leader of an important administrative centre and his requests to Moscow primarily concerned such issues as distribution of resources and budget demands. Such demands were rather typical not only for the Leningrad administration, but also for other regions in the Soviet Union. It appears that local governments were constantly demanding that the centre give them new capital to invest and additional food and industrial quota.<sup>290</sup> Frictions between Leningrad and Moscow may be interpreted in terms of typical conflicts between the centre and periphery rather than personal disagreements between Kirov and the central administration.

Kirov's speeches delivered in the 1930s portray Kirov as a responsible leader of Leningrad, rather than a contender for leadership of the Communist Party. Kirov seemed to be preoccupied with the internal situation within the Leningrad region. As a result of increasing population, the Leningrad administration faced problems with the distribution of fuel, the water supply and the sewerage system. By 1934, the population of Leningrad increased to

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<sup>287</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 125.

<sup>288</sup> J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges*, 1987, 94.

<sup>289</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 108.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid*, 114.



three million people, whereas in 1926 the population was 1.1 million people.<sup>291</sup> Although in his speeches Kirov mentioned general policies of the party, he generally focused more on the local developments in Leningrad. In several speeches he promoted a better life for the Leningrad workers and their families, focused on the importance of schooling specialists and the improvement of the general level of literacy among the population.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier in this chapter Kirov was quite seldom at the Politburo meetings in Moscow. If Kirov had ambitions to change the course of policy he should have attended the Politburo meetings which were in the centre of the formulation of policies. It may be presumed that Kirov did not participate in the Politburo meetings in order not to attract attention to his alternative position. However, by not attending the Politburo meetings he attracted even more attention. Stalin thoroughly watched the attendance of the Politburo meetings.<sup>292</sup> There is also a theory that Stalin personally tried to prevent Kirov from attending Moscow in 1934: “The story is told that Stalin had prevented Kirov from attending the meetings of the Politburo in Moscow for several months under the pretext that his presence in Leningrad was indispensable”.<sup>293</sup> However, archival materials revealed that Kirov was very busy with administration of his region and did not wish to leave his Leningrad affairs, which required his presence. Moreover, whenever present at the Politburo meetings Kirov did not seem to actively participate in the deliberations. Khrushchev recollected that Mikoyan told him that, ‘He [Kirov] did not make statements on any issues. He kept silence. I don’t know what it meant.’<sup>294</sup> Politburo documents also reveal that Kirov did not play any distinguished role in the deliberations. Therefore, Kirov did not seem to have ambitions to change the central policies. A similar conclusion was reached by Khlevniuk when noting that, ‘Kirov conducted himself less like a full member of the Politburo and more like an influential administrator of one of the country’s major party organisations.’<sup>295</sup>

There is, however, the theory that Kirov played a decisive role in the elimination of ration cards for bread, which was adopted during the November *plenum* of the CC in 1934. Kirov’s alleged role in the elimination of ration cards has been considered as one of the most important signs of Kirov’s liberalisation. The abolishment of the ration system signified the reorientation of the economic policy from being primarily based on repressive administrative

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<sup>291</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov*, 2001, 143.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid, 322.

<sup>293</sup> Boris Nicolaevsky, “The Letter of an Old Bolshevik”. In ed. J.D. Zagoria, *Power and the Soviet Elite: The Letter of an Old Bolshevik and Other Essays*. (London: Pall Mall Press, 1966), 32.

<sup>294</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, “Memuary Nikity Khrushcheva”, in *Voprosy Istorii* №3, 1990, 73.

<sup>295</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 111.

measures to being more open.<sup>296</sup> The suppositions that Kirov initiated the abolishment of the ration cards originated from an account of Aleksandr Orlov, an earlier NKVD officer. Orlov's assumptions were based on a conflict between Leningrad and Moscow in 1934. Kirov used reserved supplies from the Leningrad Military District without permission from Moscow. When Kirov was criticised for his actions by the central leadership, he explained that workers had to be fed. Allegedly, Stalin asked why Leningrad workers should eat better than all the others. Kirov exclaimed in response that it was the time to abolish the ration system and start feeding workers as they should be fed.<sup>297</sup> However, there is no document in the archival documentation to support Orlov's theory. The rationing system was originally proclaimed as a temporary measure in the early 1930s caused by the poor harvests, procurement crisis and the lack of grain. However, the situation improved already by the beginning of 1934, due to a successful harvest of 1933. In one of his letters to Kaganovich on 22 October 1934, Stalin considered the elimination of the ration system as an important reform and he asserted to implement it in full in January 1935:

We must have in the state's hands 1.4 billion to 1.5 billion poods of grain in order to get rid of the rationing system for bread at the end of this year, a system that until recently was necessary and useful but has now shackled the national economy. We must get rid of the rationing system for bread [...]. This reform, which I consider an extremely serious reform, should be prepared right away, so that it can begin to be implemented in full in January 1935. But in order to carry out this reform, we must have a sufficient reserve of grain.<sup>298</sup>

Stalin's letter to Kaganovich demonstrates that Stalin personally was aware of the need for elimination of the ration cards for bread and he favoured the reform eventually. The elimination of the ration system was implemented under the leadership of Stalin himself. At the November *plenum* in 1934, Kirov's ideas did not seem to go beyond ideas of other members of Stalin's circle. In the RGASPI, there is a sketch of Kirov's speech about the results of the November *plenum*, which he was supposed to deliver the day he was murdered. In his personal notes prepared for the speech Kirov wrote about the significance of the elimination of the ration system and its positive implications.<sup>299</sup> Other than general evaluations of the reform, there is no inclination towards any different view from the rest of the Stalinists. Kirov's notes basically reflected the main points delivered in Stalin's speech at the *plenum*. Stalin emphasised the importance of understanding the need for the elimination of the ration system and its implications.<sup>300</sup> Consequently, Stalin's position in favour of the

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<sup>296</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 111.

<sup>297</sup> A. Orlov, *Tainaia istoria stalinskikh prestupleny*, (New York: Vremia i My, 1983), 24.

<sup>298</sup> RGASPI, f. 81, op. 3, d. 100, ll. 83-87, (22.10.1934) in R.W. Davies, *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence 1931-36*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 284-285.

<sup>299</sup> RGASPI, f. 80, op. 18, d. 171, ll. 23-25.

<sup>300</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 484, l.42.

reform does not suggest any conflict between Kirov and Stalin over the elimination of the ration system. The Politburo's special folders implicate that there was no possible division between soft- and hard-liners. Earlier classified files from the Politburo archive indicate a general consensus in the Politburo in 1934.

## THE SEVENTEENTH PARTY CONGRESS

According to Nicolaevsky's account, 'Kirov unfolded the basic features of his master plan at the Seventeenth Party Congress.'<sup>301</sup> As a result, the events during the Seventeenth Party Congress have been central in the discussion of Kirov's possible opposition to Stalin and his alternative position within the Party. On the surface it could seem that the Seventeenth Party Congress in some way represented a beginning of a new phase in the history of the Communist Party. For the first time, there was no official opposition to the established policies. The Party leadership was unanimous in the correctness of the economic model. The economic crisis that the Party faced earlier in industry and agriculture was practically over. The successful harvest of 1933 was perceived as the first proof of correctness of the General Line of the party.<sup>302</sup> Participants of the Congress enthusiastically praised Stalin as their *vozhd*, or the leader, and seemed to believe that the worst of their worries were behind them.<sup>303</sup> At the Seventeenth Congress, or otherwise also known as the 'Congress of Victors', the Soviet party gave an impression of a monolithic, harmonious and united group.

However, the analysis of the stenographic reports taken during the Seventeenth Party Congress revealed some disagreements within the nucleus of the Party. Reports taken during the Seventeenth Congress do not suggest conflicts between Kirov and Stalin, but they reveal a disagreement between Ordzhonikidze and Molotov over the rate of further economic planning.<sup>304</sup> The question is whether the conflict between Ordzhonikidze and Molotov can be explained in terms of the disagreements between the "moderates" and the "radicals", or whether it was a personal conflict between the two.

Ordzhonikidze, a commissar for heavy industry, advocated a slower tempos for the Second Five Year Plan whereas Molotov inclined to proceed with a tempos as high as during the First Five Year Plan throughout the early 1930s. Disagreements about the rate of the Second Five Year Plan were already evident in 1931, when the *Gosplan*, with Kuibyshev at its head, began

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<sup>301</sup> Boris Nicolaevsky, "Murder of Kirov", in ed. Janet D. Zagoria, *Power and the Soviet Elite*, 1966, 77.

<sup>302</sup> J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges*, 1987, 12.

<sup>303</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 86.

<sup>304</sup> J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges*, 1987, 12.

drafting the plan. The first version caused so many arguments that it was closed from all public discussion of the Plan and was even suspended from publication.<sup>305</sup> Perhaps that is why there is little reference to the Second Year Plan in Kirov's speeches around that time. The second version with reduced targets was introduced in February 1932. In January 1932, at one of the Leningrad conferences, Kirov stated:

Do we set too high targets for ourselves [for the second Five Year Plan]? The first Five Year Plan should be the bail and examination for us here. We have accomplished it successfully in 1932. ...The programme for the Second Five Year Plan does not differ from the first one in a way that there is nothing extraordinary, nothing impossible for the Bolsheviks there. This plan, this programme, in Stalin's words – it is our preparedness for struggle, our self-control and our desire for victory.<sup>306</sup>

It is seen that in his speech Kirov supported high tempos for the second Five Year plan. Finally, a third version of the Plan was introduced at the CC *plenum* in January 1933. The third version contained the lowest targets and its approach was approved by Stalin.<sup>307</sup> In his speech about the results of the CC *plenum*, Kirov stated that Stalin's speech set the main targets' further development.<sup>308</sup> In his speech, Kirov showed full loyalty to the adopted resolutions. He stated that it was necessary to fulfil the designated targets. Kirov said, "The plan is an order. It means don't argue, just fulfil."<sup>309</sup> From Kirov's speeches it does not seem like he had any distinguished position regarding the tempos for the second Five Year plan throughout the 1930s. Ordzhonikidze seemed to play a more central role in regards to the planning of the second Five Year plan than Kirov. For instance, at the Seventeenth Party Congress, Ordzhonikidze proposed even lower annual targets than was planned.

The Second Five Year Plan was ought to be approved at the Congress and it was for this reason that it was on the top of agenda then. As noted by Getty discussions and debates on the speeches at party congresses had become routine by 1934. Due to this it was seen 'unusual and even scandalous that Ordzhonikidze openly challenged figures presented in Molotov's speech as being inconsistent.'<sup>310</sup> Ordzhonikidze's opposition suggested a depth of disagreement over the tempos. The matter was ought to be settled by the commission in a closed session, which decided to accept Ordzhonikidze's proposal of reduction of Molotov's figures. Finally, Stalin sided with the "moderates" regarding the second Five Year Plan. Therefore Kirov and Stalin could not be antagonists since Stalin himself supported moderate rates for further economic development. Since Stalin sided with Ordzhonikidze on the tempos

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<sup>305</sup> J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges*, 1987, 15.

<sup>306</sup> S.M. Kirov, *Izbrannye stati i rechi 1912-1934*, 1939, 476.

<sup>307</sup> J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges*, 1987, 15.

<sup>308</sup> S.M. Kirov, *Izbrannye stati i rechi 1912-1934*, 1939, 533.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid, 543.

<sup>310</sup> J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges*, 1987, 16.

of the second Five Year plan there is no reason to believe that Ordzhonikidze wished for Stalin's replacement since he got his way even with Stalin. From the archival documents, Ordzhonikidze clearly appears as a more "moderate" candidature than Kirov. After a thorough analysis of the documentation, Khlevniuk arrived at the conclusion that the lowering of the pace should be considered in terms of continuation of the struggle between different branches of government over ratios between production and capital investment.<sup>311</sup> In the disagreement over the ratio for the second Five Year plan, Ordzhonikidze was acting as a commissar of the heavy industry, rather than as a representative of a "moderate" grouping or out of personal rivalry with Molotov.

With regards to Kirov at the Seventeenth Congress, Cohen noted that, 'the "moderates" under the leadership of Kirov, unlike Stalin, spoke with an unmistakably conciliatory spirit.'<sup>312</sup> According to Nicolaevsky's account, "Kirov called upon all Party members for the closest unity, based on the voluntary subordination of the minority to the majority, since only with such unity could the Party exercise hegemony in the country."<sup>313</sup> However, analysis of Kirov's speech does not provide a similar view. Kirov conveyed himself as an enthusiastic Stalinist in his speech at the Congress. There is no trace of opposition or moderation in his delivered speech. He spoke generally about the developments in the Leningrad region, about upcoming possible challenges and their solutions. Moreover, in frequent references to the correctness of Stalin's programme, Kirov openly demonstrated his support to Stalin personally. In some way Kirov's speech could even be characterised as fawning on Stalin.<sup>314</sup> Therefore, like the rest of the members of Stalin's clique, Kirov provided for the development of Stalin's cult of personality. Like the rest of the delegates Kirov honoured Stalin and praised him as the 'best a helmsman of our Socialist building' and 'the great strategist'. All of the delegates praised Stalin in their speeches.<sup>315</sup> However, it is interesting that Kirov was the one to propose to 'accept Stalin's report in full, as party law' without usual preparation of a resolution on Stalin's report.<sup>316</sup> Kirov's proposition in some way brought a cult of Stalin to a different level. Therefore, his speech distinguished itself due to his especial praise of Stalin rather opposition to him. It may be assumed that those expressions of praise were only formal celebration of Stalin. Presumably, Kirov tried to conceal his opposition to Stalin behind the

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<sup>311</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 107.

<sup>312</sup> Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution. A Political Biography 1888-1938*, 1973, 345.

<sup>313</sup> Boris Nicolaevsky, "Murder of Kirov", in ed. J.D. Zagoria, *Power and the Soviet Elite: The Letter of an Old Bolshevik and Other Essays*. 1966, 91.

<sup>314</sup> N.A. Yefimov, "Sergei Mironovich Kirov" in *Voprosy Istorii* Nr.11-12, 1995, 62.

<sup>315</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov*, 2001, 308.

<sup>316</sup> *XVII sjezd VKP(b). Stenographicheskii otchet*, 1934, 252.

elevated words. However, there is no document or speech that can either prove or contradict that view.

In the stenographic report from the Congress, it is clear that Kirov's speech was energetically welcomed by the delegates. His speech caused a 'prolonged storm of standing applause'.<sup>317</sup> Scholars have compared such a reception to that of Stalin's, concluding that such an extraordinarily enthusiastic reception was second or even equal to Stalin's.<sup>318</sup> Perhaps that is why Stalin decided to abstain from a final address to the Congress which was his typical finale. Historians interpret in a way that Kirov stole the show by elevating Stalin unprecedented heights.<sup>319</sup> It seems that the significance of the prolonged applause to Kirov was exaggerated throughout time. The reaction of the audience could be explained by the fact that Kirov was a skilful orator and his speech was energetic and appealing. Moreover, from the comments during Kirov's speech, it is evident that the audience applauded when Kirov mentioned the greatness of Stalin. For instance, there was no standing ovation when Kirov was speaking about success in Leningrad. Therefore it may be considered that the ovation was not personally to Kirov, but rather to Stalin. Furthermore, the ovation for Molotov and Kaganovich, unconditional hard-line Stalinists, were stronger.<sup>320</sup> Nevertheless, a prolonged ovation to Kirov was interpreted as a sign of broad support to Kirov from the Congress. Apparently, on the eve of the Seventeenth Congress, Kirov was asked by his fellow comrades to replace Stalin as a General Secretary.

### THE QUESTION OF STALIN'S REPLACEMENT

The view that Kirov was offered to replace Stalin as the General Secretary originated from the presentations given by Roy Medvedev in the late 1980s. Medvedev concluded that during the Seventeenth Party Congress the group of the secretaries of regional Party committees and secretaries of the non-Russian central committees personally asked Kirov to replace Stalin in the post of the General Secretary.<sup>321</sup> Apparently regional leaders felt the results of Stalin's policy errors more than anyone else and it is due to this that they united to replace Stalin. Medvedev's story has been used by historians as one of the arguments to prove that Kirov represented an alternative to Stalin. Although appealing, Medvedev's theory suffers some factual inconsistencies.

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<sup>317</sup> *XVII siezd VKP(b). Stenographicheskii Otchet*, 1934, 259.

<sup>318</sup> Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution. A Political Biography 1888-1938*. 1973, 345.

<sup>319</sup> Amy Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery*, 1999, 172.

<sup>320</sup> Åsmund Egge, *Kirov-Gåten*, 2009, 201.

<sup>321</sup> Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 1971, 331.

First and foremost, it is noteworthy that the General Secretary was usually elected during the CC *plenum* and not during congresses.<sup>322</sup> Moreover, as rightfully noted by Egge, Medvedev did not specify any sources besides ‘the scanty reports from Old Bolsheviks’ regarding the story of the possible replacement of Stalin.<sup>323</sup> Medvedev’s story presumably stemmed from various recollections of the Seventeenth Congress delegates published in the 1960s. Some of them inclined there was a private meeting to replace Stalin with Kirov, while others denied that as rumours.<sup>324</sup> Generally, none of those delegates was a witness or a participant of the conversation about Stalin’s replacement by Kirov. Kirilina also noted that it was suspicious that all of the recollections appeared almost simultaneously in 1960 and not after the Twentieth Party Congress when people returned from camps and prisons. Such recollections did not either appear in 1957 when the first investigation commission was set up.<sup>325</sup> As a result, it is still uncertain whether there was a private meeting during the Seventeenth Party Congress where Kirov was proposed to replace Stalin. Kirilina concluded that the theory about conversations was a mystification. She noted that such a conversation could not occur at Ordzhonikidze’s flat: Ordzhonikidze was loyal to Stalin around that time.<sup>326</sup>

In his conversations with Chuev Molotov remembered that a group of around ten members proposed that Kirov replace Stalin in the post of the General Secretary, but Kirov refused.<sup>327</sup> Molotov also denied that Kirov personally had aspirations to replace Stalin: “although Kirov was a capable regional leader and could work masses well, he was unsuitable as a leader of the highest rank”.<sup>328</sup> It is necessary to remember that Molotov was a very close associate with Stalin and remained as such until the end. Therefore, he was aware of many of the matters important to Stalin. As noted by Egge, there is no reason to believe that Molotov needed to contrive the story. On the contrary, as a loyal follower of Stalin he would rather conceal the facts of the story that a leading nucleus of the Party wanted to replace Stalin.<sup>329</sup> However, in his conversations Molotov did not tell the source of his suppositions either. It may be considered that, like Medvedev, he was also influenced by the reports of the delegates in the 1960s. However, it should be noted that Molotov was devoted to Stalin until the end.

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<sup>322</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov*, 2001, 312.

<sup>323</sup> R. Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 1971, 331 and Åsmund Egge, *Kirov-Gåten*, 2009, 201.

<sup>324</sup> Åsmund Egge, *Kirov-Gåten*, 2009, 201.

<sup>324</sup> Felix Chuev, *Molotov Remembers*, 1993, 218.

<sup>325</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov*, 2001, 315.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Felix Chuev, *Molotov Remembers*, 1993, 218.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Åsmund Egge, *Kirov-Gåten*, Unipub 2009:205.

Therefore, his story might be subjective. He praised and honoured Stalin and it is understandable that Kirov could not be compared with Stalin's "greatness".

Several historians, such as Kirilina, Khlevniuk and Getty, concluded that Kirov could not be an alternative to Stalin. In my opinion, Kirov personally did not have the aspirations to replace Stalin as the leader of the party and he did not have a distinguished position from Stalin. However, that does not mean to say that he could not be considered as an alternative to Stalin by other members of the Party, or, for that matter, that Stalin did not perceive Kirov to be a political threat.

It seems that Kirov could be in fact be considered as a suitable alternative to Stalin in the middle of the 1930s by his fellow Communists due to his modest, but loyal, position within the party. Stalin's authority within the Party was more or less unquestionable by 1934. Some of the Old Bolsheviks may have been annoyed by Stalin's power and wished for collective leadership that was present during Lenin. Kirov's candidature seemed to be the most appropriate. He was tolerant, loyally followed the Party throughout the period, had friendly relationships with the leading members of the Party and presented himself as a popular leader in general. To conclude, even if Kirov was considered to be a new leader, he was chosen as one not because of his distinguished position within the Party, but rather due to his unremarkable role. Conquest conveyed a similar view when he suggested that Kirov was ideal as a representative for a collective leadership with no claim to supremacy.<sup>330</sup> On the other hand, it may be claimed that in the early 1930s Stalin was still quite collegial in his manner and this changed over time. Increasing alienation from the political elite was evident later in the Stalin's regime.<sup>331</sup> Presumably, despite Stalin's attempt to present himself as an arbiter between different extremes, some of the Party members may have been displeased with his rising authority. The question of elections during the Seventeenth party congress can shed some light upon this issue.

## THE QUESTION OF THE CC ELECTIONS

Dubious theories around the results of the elections of the new CC membership, held on 9 February 1934 have acquired special significance in theories regarding a possible opposition to Stalin in this year. Official results of polling of the Seventeenth Party Congress delegates revealed that Kirov received four votes against his candidature and Stalin only three as

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<sup>330</sup> Robert Conquest, *Stalin. Breaker of Nations*, 1992, 178.

<sup>331</sup> Stephen G. Wheatcroft, "From Team-Stalin to Degenerate Tyranny", in E.A. Rees, *The Nature of Stalin's Dictatorship. The Politburo 1924-1953*, 2004, 79.



members of the CC. However, some time later an assumption appeared that suggested that the results of the elections were falsified by Stalin's associate Kaganovich, who led the counting committee, when he found out that Stalin had received fewer votes than any other candidate.<sup>332</sup> Since there were more than one thousand participants in the elections, results of the elections revealed that the Soviet leadership was displeased with Stalin, whereas Kirov was unquestionably among the Party's favourites.

It is unclear as to how many votes Stalin in fact received against his candidature at the election of the CC in 1934. The actual number of votes against Stalin's candidature in the CC has varied from 300 to 160 on different accounts. Roy Medvedev, for example, noted that as many as 270 delegates voted against Stalin.<sup>333</sup> Medvedev's assumptions were based on an account of one of the surviving members of the counting committee V. M. Verkhovnykh, who wrote in 1960:

Being a delegate of the Seventeenth Congress..., I was elected to count the ballots. Altogether there were chosen sixty five or seventy five people, I do not remember exactly. I neither remember how many ballot boxes there were, either thirteen or fifteen... There were supposed to be 1225 or 1227 members at the elections. 1222 voted. Stalin, Molotov and Kaganovich received the most votes "against". Each of them received more than one hundred votes against, I do not remember exactly, but I believe Stalin obtained 125 or 123".<sup>334</sup>

It is evident that the author seemed to be unsure about the results and it should be taken into consideration that this was written more than thirty years after the actual elections. The theory about falsification of the results of the elections became appealing to the adherents of a theory that the Soviet Party was displeased with Stalin. However, there is no factual record in the existing documents that there were as many as 267 bulletins missing. On the basis of the investigation commission that was set up in 1957 to inspect Kirov's murder, it was concluded that there were 1227 delegates who had a voting authority at the elections, whereas 1059 votes were submitted. It is evident that no more than 166 bulletins or votes were missing.<sup>335</sup> As a result, it may be assumed that Medvedev's account contained improbable results. If Stalin received more than three votes against his candidature it could not have exceeded more than 166 votes.

In their recollections, three surviving delegates of the thirteen who counted the ballots agreed that there were some votes against Stalin, but they were not certain about the amount. Neither did they recollect Kaganovich's order to burn votes against Stalin or withdraw of any ballots.

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<sup>332</sup> Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 1971, 332.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov*, 2001, 317.

<sup>335</sup> *Izvestia TSK KPSS* Nr. 7, 1989, 120.

Generally, most of them merely agreed that there were fewer ballots than the number of participating delegates in the Congress. It may be assumed that some of the delegates simply failed to vote. Elections were held on the last day of the Seventeenth Party Congress, in which case some of the delegates could have left the Congress earlier, or merely failed to participate in the elections.<sup>336</sup> Scholars tend to imply that it was not unusual that some of the ballots were missing from the final count. There are some other examples of missing ballots after the opening of the urns in Soviet history. For example, at the Sixteenth Party Congress that was held in 1930 there were 1266 delegates with a voting authority. There were 1259 ballots, whereas only 1132 were eventually submitted.<sup>337</sup> Therefore, it is questionable whether the ballots from the counting boxes at the Seventeenth Party Congress were withdrawn on Stalin's demand, or whether there is another explanation for their absence. The fact that Kirov received only some votes against may be explained by his modest position within the party, rather than his popularity. In the case of his oppositional position within the party, he could have acquired more votes against his candidature.<sup>338</sup> Unanimous polling of Kirov was indirect proof of his support to Stalin and not his opposition to Stalin.

## TRANSFER TO MOSCOW

At the same CC *plenum* where elections to the Politburo were held, Kirov was formally elected as one of four Central Committee secretaries on the proposal by Stalin. As a result of his new appointment, Kirov was to leave his position as the Leningrad party chief and move to Moscow. However, Kirov resisted leaving his position in Leningrad for a new one in Moscow. He himself explained his reluctance on the basis of an unfinished second Five Year Plan, his unpreparedness to move to Moscow and deteriorating health. Allegedly, Kirov's reasoning to stay in Leningrad was supported by Ordzhonikidze and Kuybyshev. As a result of Kirov's reaction and support of other Politburo members Stalin walked out from the meeting enraged.<sup>339</sup> The affair ended in a compromise: Kirov would be elected as a Central Committee secretary, but could nevertheless keep his position as the Leningrad party leader for the two upcoming years.

This account originated from memoirs of Mikhail Rosliakov, a close associate of Kirov in the 1930s, who allegedly acquired the information from Kirov himself. For years Rosliakov's account was used as direct evidence of existing estrangement between Kirov and Stalin in the

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<sup>336</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov*, 2001, 320.

<sup>337</sup> Matt Lenoe, "Did Stalin Kill Kirov and Does it Matter?", in *Journal of Modern History* 74, June 2002, 374.

<sup>338</sup> Yu.V. Yemelianov, *Stalin na vershine vlasti*, (Moscow, 2003), 74.

<sup>339</sup> M. Rosliakov, "Kak eto bylo", in *Zvezda* Nr. 7, 1989, 82.

early 1930s. The conflict between Stalin and Kirov over Kirov's transfer to Moscow has been verified by the archival documentation.<sup>340</sup> The question remains as to whether Kirov's refusal to Stalin was a sign of policy disagreement, as it may be assumed.

Kirov's objections could be explained by his desire to proceed with his familiar work in Leningrad. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, Kirov was fond of his work in Leningrad. Over the years, he acquired a network of loyal colleagues, but by moving to Moscow Kirov would lose some of his independence and would be directly subordinate to Kaganovich and Molotov who were higher in the hierarchy.<sup>341</sup> In that respect, it may seem that Stalin decided to transfer Kirov because he was threatened by his independent position. Stalin initiated Kirov's transfer in order to weaken his authority in the Party and obtain better control over him in Moscow. Stalin was careful not to allow any of his subordinates become too powerful.<sup>342</sup> Rosliakov implied in his account that Stalin's motives to transfer Kirov were dictated by his fear of Kirov's strong position in Leningrad.<sup>343</sup> A similar interpretation was adopted by Orlov who stated that, "due to being annoyed by Kirov's independence, Stalin decided to remove him from Leningrad."<sup>344</sup> Nonetheless, the significance of the confrontation seems to have been exaggerated over time. The conflict between Kirov and Stalin seemed to be a typical bureaucratic confrontation and did not reflect a policy disagreement. Stalin's motives to replace Kirov could be explained by his desire to counterbalance Kaganovich's influence, which is something he in fact did in 1935 and 1936.<sup>345</sup>

Furthermore, it may be considered that Stalin needed a loyal administrator in his Secretariat that would assist him. Stalin was anxious to ensure that people of proper calibre were retained in the central party organs, to ensure that their authority was not diminished.<sup>346</sup> Therefore, Kirov's reassignment may be interpreted in terms of promotion. Stalin trusted Kirov and therefore needed him in his closest circle. Rightfully noticed by Getty, if Stalin and Kirov were antagonists, it would be difficult to explain Kirov's continued rise.<sup>347</sup> The positions within the Secretariat, Politburo and Orgburo would give Kirov more space to challenge Stalin politically. The Politburo was an important policy-making body. The Orgburo

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<sup>340</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov*, 2001, 312.

<sup>341</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 96.

<sup>342</sup> E.A. Rees, "Stalin as Leader, 1924-1937", in E.A. Rees, *The Nature of Stalin's Dictatorship. The Politburo 1924-1953*, 2004, 46.

<sup>343</sup> M. Rosliakov, "Kak eto bylo", in *Zvezda* Nr. 7, 1989, 82.

<sup>344</sup> A. Orlov, *Tainaia istoria stalinskikh prestupleny*, 1983, 27.

<sup>345</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 96.

<sup>346</sup> E.A. Rees, "Stalin as Leader, 1924-1937" in E.A. Rees, *The Nature of Stalin's Dictatorship. The Politburo 1924-1953*, 2004, 44.

<sup>347</sup> J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges*, 1987, 94.

concerned itself with the appointment of leading officials. It led internal party campaigns such as the exchange and checking of party documents, monitored the party membership, and ensured central control over local party bodies.<sup>348</sup> The Secretariat played a vital role within the system of administration. It issued instructions on policy implementation and monitored policy performance.<sup>349</sup> Therefore, if Kirov was to represent an independent platform his new position would give him legitimate ways of establishment of his “moderate” programme. However, as noted earlier, Kirov was unwilling to transfer to Moscow. From the agenda of the Orgburo and the Secretariat kept in the RGASPI archive, it is evident that Kirov was often absent from the majority of the meetings throughout 1934. Therefore, Kirov did not perform his duties of the Central Committee Secretary. Kirov’s obvious reluctance to participate in the central political matters suggests the idea that he did not have ambitions to advance any alternative line of policy development.

### KIROV AND STALIN IN THE 1930S

The personal relationship between Kirov and Stalin may also substantiate the view that Stalin wanted Kirov closer to him in Moscow due to personal reasons. Analysis of the existing documents has not suggested Stalin’s irritation with Kirov. On the contrary, recollections of people close to Stalin, as well as correspondence between Stalin, Kirov and Ordzhonikidze, imply a very close and affectionate relationship between Kirov and Stalin. They holidayed together during summer, there was regular connection between Moscow and Leningrad, and Kirov was welcomed by Stalin’s family. Stalin’s daughter Svetlana Allilueva portrayed Kirov in her memoirs as a close friend of the Stalin family:

Kirov was a close friend of our family already since the Caucasus time. He was well acquainted with grandfather’s family and was very fond of my mother... Kirov stayed at our house, he was a friend, an old comrade. Father was very fond of him, he was very attached to him. ...Kirov was closest to father, closer than Svanidze or any other relatives or colleague.<sup>350</sup>

In his interviews with Chuev, Molotov even described Kirov as Stalin’s favourite.<sup>351</sup> Stalin’s bodyguards, Vlasik and Rybin, also witnessed an affectionate relationship between the two.<sup>352</sup> Besides Vlasik, Kirov was the only one who was permitted to bathe with Stalin in the Russian sauna, *bania*.

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<sup>348</sup> E.A. Rees, “Stalin as Leader, 1924-1937”, in E.A. Rees, *The Nature of Stalin’s Dictatorship. The Politburo 1924-1953*, 2004, 32.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>350</sup> Svetlana Allilueva, *Dvadtsat pisem k drugu*, (London: Hutchinson, 1967), 132.

<sup>351</sup> Felix Chuev, *Molotov Remembers*, 1993, 221.

<sup>352</sup> A.T. Rybin, “Riadam so Stalinyom”, in *Sotsialisticheskie issledovaniia*, Nr. 3, 1988, 87 in Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov*, 2001, 311.

Kirov and Stalin became even closer in 1932 after Stalin's young wife, Nadezhda Allilueva, committed suicide. According to the recollections of Maria Svanidze, a relative from Stalin's first marriage, Stalin himself used to say that Kirov took care of him like a baby when his wife died: "After Nadia's death he [Kirov] was the closest person, who managed to find a way to Joseph, who gave him missing warmth and comfort."<sup>353</sup> Kirov's visits to Stalin became more frequent after Allilueva's death. Prior to Allilueva's death, Kirov used to stay at Ordzhonikidze's flat. However, according to the memoirs of Ordzhonikidze's wife and Kirov's wife, since Allilueva's death in the late autumn of 1932, Kirov almost always stayed at Stalin's flat whenever he was in Moscow.<sup>354</sup> As noted by Egge, the Yakovlev investigation committee, which was set up to investigate Kirov's death in 1989, also concluded that the personal relationship between Kirov and Stalin was quite close in the early 1930s.<sup>355</sup> On the basis of the recollection and memoirs of people close to Stalin, it may be concluded that their personal relationship was rather warm and affectionate. Kirov was not like any other member of the Party; he could even be called Stalin's favourite.

It is, however, unfortunate that there is no assessment of the Kirov-Stalin relationship by people close to Kirov. Despite most of the documents revealing a good personal relationship between Kirov and Stalin, it does not necessarily mean that they could not disagree politically. Moreover, it should be taken into consideration that there is a profound amount of letters between Kirov and Stalin missing from the archive, and that the assessment of the personal relationship was mainly done on the basis of Stalin's companions. However, as has been demonstrated, most of the conflicts between Kirov and Stalin were connected with regional Leningrad business and did not seem to challenge general policies. Traditionalists did not ignore the good relationship between Stalin and Kirov, but used it as evidence of Stalin's duplicity. The personal relationship between Stalin and Kirov implies one that is very close and affectionate relationship. Stalin seemed to trust Kirov and it may be assumed that, on the basis of their close relationship, Stalin required Kirov's presence closer in Moscow.

## CONCLUSION

In the existing archival documentation there is no inclination towards an existence of two opposed factions based on moderate and radical visions. There is neither confirmation of Kirov's alternative position within the party. An analysis of Kirov's statements, in combination with a discussion of his administration in his region, has led to conclusions that

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<sup>353</sup> Maria Svanidze, "Dnevnik Marii Anisimovny Svanidze", in *Istochnik* Nr. 1, 1993, 14.

<sup>354</sup> Alla Kirilina, *Neizvestny Kirov*, 2001, 307.

<sup>355</sup> Åsmund Egge, *Kirov-Gåten*, 2009, 188.

Kirov primarily followed central resolutions and did not represent any distinguishingly different views from Stalin. In 1933, Kirov seemed to support relaxation that was already underway. It has been shown that relaxation of policies in 1933 represented a reaction to domestic circumstances in combination with international factors, rather than Kirov's personal influence. In his demands to the central government, he acted like many other regional bosses conditioned by local pressures, such as famine for example. Although several regional secretaries requested lowering the grain procurement plans, they did not seem to act as a united opposition. Moreover, analysis has shown that Stalin himself seemed to play a central role in the transformations of the early 1930s towards "moderation".

Kirov did not seem to occupy a significantly different position in his treatment of oppositionists. There is no record of a conflict between Kirov and Stalin about the fate of Riutin, which has often been used in the theory of Kirov's opposition to Stalin. There is also no documentation of Kirov's allegedly moderate treatment of oppositionists. Kirov's public speeches did not reflect a moderate attitude towards the opposition. On the contrary, the results of the OGPU arrests in the Leningrad region showed that repression methods in Leningrad were equally employed like in other regions of the Soviet Union. An analysis of the events during the Seventeenth Party Congress has not suggested any trace of the existence of an anti-Stalin coalition, as such. There were some conflicts between some of the delegates of the Party Congress based on the disagreements over production targets for the Second Five Year Plan. However, this conflict seemed to be limited to the Congress itself and did not pursue in the following months. Moreover, Kirov seemed to be rather reserved in his position towards the pace of the second Five Year Plan, as well as not showing any interest in the central matters at the Politburo meetings. Analysis has shown that he was not among the main reporters and he was generally quiet regarding the speeches of others. Furthermore, Kirov did not seem to approve of his transfer to Moscow. Kirov seemed to enjoy his position as a leader of Leningrad rather than a leader of the opposition. In the early 1930s, Kirov revealed himself as one of the closest associates with Stalin. He loyally followed Stalin's resolutions regarding Soviet policies; his statements were in some ways a reflection of Stalin's. Furthermore, like many other faithful Stalinists, Kirov equally contributed to the formation of Stalin's cult of personality in his speeches.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

### SERGEI KIROV: A FIRM ASSOCIATE OF STALIN?

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From the full study of Sergei Kirov's political career on the basis of archival documentation, there is generally little indication of any profound signs of Kirov's alleged ambivalence to the general line of the Soviet Communist Party in the late 1920s and the early 1930s. On the basis of this research no document in the RGASPI has been found that may directly prove or refute a theory that Kirov advocated a set of reforms different from those of Stalin. Nevertheless, a broad spectre of archival sources has contributed to the establishment of a general impression of Kirov as a politician, his role in the Leningrad regional politics as well as the Soviet politics, and his relationship with Stalin and other leading members of the Soviet Communist Party.

The analysis of Kirov's speeches has revealed that his official statements seemed to change by and large with transformations in the top level of the Party. Compared with Stalin's official statements and utterances of other prominent Stalinists, Kirov's speeches generally reflect central resolutions of the Party's leadership. In his speeches, Kirov appears as an ardent Communist, a responsible politician who faithfully followed the Party's resolutions, first under the leadership of Lenin and later Stalin. Although Kirov seemed to be uncertain of his political preferences before the October Revolution, he seemed to follow the Party's resolutions dutifully after the Revolution. He devotedly advanced Lenin's NEP when it was centrally proclaimed in 1921. However, Kirov also joined the criticism of the NEP when the Party majority under the leadership of Stalin started criticising it.

After his appointment as the leader of the Leningrad Party organisation, Kirov's political position seemed to change in line with Stalin's. Moreover, Kirov's official statements in general mirrored Stalin's public utterances. Those utterances that earlier were interpreted by selected scholars in terms of Kirov's "moderate" position within the Party, considered against the general political context, appeared to be in line with general developments within the Party's elite. In cases where some deviation from the general line was found, it occurred to be in line with Stalin's. In fact, Stalin himself seemed to change between "moderate" and "radical" positions. For example, Kirov's vacillation in line with Stalin's is seen in Kirov's warning about excesses in the collectivisation in the early 1930s. In the earlier research, such statements were interpreted in terms of Kirov's support of relaxation of administrative pressure, however it was most likely meant as a response to Stalin's "Dizzy with success"

speech, in which Stalin blamed regional bosses for excessive results of collectivisation in the countryside.

It should be taken into consideration, however, that speeches of the Bolsheviks were thoroughly prepared beforehand and edited later. Like other Communists, as a responsible party member and a leader of the Leningrad organisation, Kirov also used his speeches as a way to promote the central resolutions of the Communist Party. Kirov's speeches alone should not be considered as the only proof of his loyalty to Stalin and the Party. Even at the regional party meetings, that were supposedly less heavily censored, Kirov revealed himself as a typical member of the Stalin elite. There was no sign of opposition to Stalin in Kirov's personal corrections of the speeches either. It was in general difficult to find any so-called ideological slips in Kirov's statements. There is no sign of deviation from the Party's discourse in his official statements.

Kirov showed however certain restraint towards public criticism of the Right Deviation led by Stalin's opponents, Bukharin, Tomsy and Rykov in the late 1920s. On the one hand, such a reserved position towards the leaders of the Right Deviation could be interpreted in terms of Kirov's sympathies towards the Rightist ideology. However, Kirov's position in the early campaign against the Rightists can be explained by a generally uncertain political situation. Conditioned by earlier disagreements within the leadership, the Soviet administration tried to conceal existing differences within its nucleus. Both of the factions officially denied each others' existence. Moreover, other prominent Soviet leaders, not only Kirov, seemed to be unsure about the campaign against the Right leaders. The question did not seem to be about opposing Stalin, but about how to avoid further conflicts within the party. Therefore, even Kirov's "moderate" position towards the Rightists that was interpreted in terms of Kirov's liberalism towards oppositionists, occurred to be in line with the reaction of many other prominent Communists. When the conflict with the Rightists became more open to the public, Kirov's criticism of the Rightist ideology was more in line with other Stalinists. Moreover, from the study of Kirov's political profile, he generally appears as a very cautious politician. He tried to avoid conflicts and intrigues at the top level of the Communist Party and seemed to adapt to the decisions from the top of the Soviet leadership.

Despite the reserved position towards the Rightists, Kirov did not in fact treat oppositionists in any way different from Stalin. His public speeches do not reflect a "moderate" attitude towards different members of various oppositional groups. Although Kirov did not wish to move to Leningrad in the middle of the conflict between Stalin and the leaders of the Left



Opposition, he vigorously fought against the Left Opposition in Leningrad when transferred there. Moreover, in the archive there is no record of a conflict between Stalin and Kirov over the fate of an oppositionist, Martemian Riutin, which is often placed in the centre of arguments of Kirov's opposition to Stalin and his allegedly tolerant relation towards Stalin's opponents. In fact there is no trace that such a question was raised at all at any Politburo meetings. Such conclusions are in line with the evaluation of Khlevniuk, who considered the conflict between Stalin and Kirov to be a mystification.<sup>356</sup> Stalin seemed to act carefully in the early 1930s regarding the treatment of the opposition. Even if Kirov showed some tolerance towards the opposition, it was generally in line with Stalin's official position. For instance, Stalin favoured reconciliation with former leaders of different oppositional groups in 1933, at least officially. It is for this reason that Zinoviev and Kamenev were returned to the ranks of the Communist Party and not on Kirov's personal initiative as it has been suggested by some scholars earlier. Moreover, in some of the statements, Kirov was even more critical than Stalin. For instance, Kirov questioned the sincerity of oppositionists' acknowledgement of their "mistakes" at the Seventeenth Party Congress.

Administrative pressure in the Leningrad region, which was under the authority of Kirov, was no less severe, perhaps even more severe taking into consideration the statistical data of secret police arrests. Despite some reported cases of humane treatment of prisoners who worked at the construction of the Baltic-White Sea Canal, Kirov was proud of the work done under the harsh administration of the secret police. Kirov seemed to be acquainted with the fact that the canal was constructed using prison camp labour at great human cost, but nevertheless supported it.

On the basis of the existing documentation there is no sign of oppositional tendencies in the administration of the Leningrad region. It is evident that, in comparison with other regions, collectivisation of the Leningrad region proceeded relatively slower. However, it has been demonstrated that there are other factors that may explain the delay in collectivisation in Leningrad, rather than Kirov's oppositional standing to Stalin. There were local geographical conditions that complicated collectivisation in the region. Kirov revealed himself as a faithful supporter of Stalin and Stalin's policies from above throughout his work as the Leningrad Party Secretary. He conducted himself as an influential administrator of one of the country's major party organisations, rather than a contender for power. For example, he was rarely present at the Politburo meetings in Moscow. Since the Politburo played a significant role in

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<sup>356</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 66.

the party's policy-making procedures Kirov should have participated more often in order to advance his ideas and proposals, if indeed he had any. On the contrary, however, even when Kirov was present, he was not among the central speakers and seemed to be rather reserved during the party debates.

The examination of the personal relationship between Kirov and Stalin demonstrated that the two were not only close associates, but also very close friends. Kirov was among Stalin's favourites. They were often holidaying together, Kirov stayed at Stalin's flat whenever he was in Moscow and they shared daily conversations over the phone. A close personal relationship however should not be used solely as the only base for interpretation of the question of whether Kirov and Stalin were political antagonists. The archival documentation has revealed some conflicts between Kirov and Stalin in the early 1930s. However, as rightfully noticed by Khlevniuk, those conflicts seemed to be limited to the common disagreements between the centre and provinces, rather than ideological conflicts between the two leaders.<sup>357</sup>

As a matter of fact, Kirov was obliged with his career in the Soviet Communist Party to Stalin personally. On the personal initiative of Stalin Kirov was chosen to substitute Grigory Zinoviev on the post of the Secretary of the Leningrad Party Committee, which together with the Moscow Party organisation presented an important party committee in the Soviet Union. Kirov's appointment in Leningrad, therefore, demonstrated that Stalin entrusted Kirov with important tasks. Also, on Stalin's personal initiative, Kirov was elected to the Politburo and the Party's Secretariat in the early 1930s. Although it has often been claimed that Kirov's planned reassignment to Moscow, also on Stalin's initiative, signified Stalin's awareness of Kirov's oppositional role, Kirov's transfer to Moscow could also be interpreted in terms of promotion within the Party hierarchy. Therefore, Kirov's continued rise within the Soviet Party, partially due to Stalin's assistance, may prove that Stalin and Kirov were not antagonists, but rather allies. Moreover, Kirov was politically compromised due to his pre-revolutionary experiences, such as writing for a "bourgeois" newspaper. The Soviet Party, including Stalin, were aware of Kirov's "liberal" past. For instance, after articles in the central newspapers appeared in 1929, Kirov's pre-revolutionary experiences were characterised by the party as "incorrect". It seemed that due to Stalin's personal support on the matter, Kirov avoided further discussions in the Party about the nature of his Bolshevism. Taking into consideration the Party history, opposition to Stalin's policies and the general line could have caused doubts about loyalty to the Party as such. Kirov was an experienced politician and he

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<sup>357</sup> Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House. Stalin and his inner Circle*, 2009, 62.

was aware of the party tradition regarding factionalism. Due to the Party's awareness of Kirov's questionable past, Stalin had a hold on him. As a result, Kirov was dependent on Stalin and consequently it would have been difficult for him to advance policies alternative to Stalin's.<sup>358</sup>

Kirov did not reveal himself as the initiator of the relaxation of policies beginning in 1933. It has been suggested that relaxation could be caused by domestic economic crisis, which was accompanied by a terrible famine in most of the Soviet Union, together with the new international circumstances, rather than the initiative of Kirov. Although, the study of the archival documentation has revealed requests to Stalin from regional bosses, including Kirov, aimed at the reduction of procurement targets. However, they did not seem to act as a united front of opposition, but rather as individual leaders who were standing up for interests of their respective provinces. Kirov did not seem to act as a representative of a united group of moderate minded party members, but rather as a responsible leader of the Leningrad region. Moreover, Stalin himself seemed to admit the necessity of a certain retreat from the administrative pressure in order to ease the critical situation in the countryside. It has been rightfully noted by such scholars as Khlevniuk, Getty and Egge that Kirov supported a "moderate" line that was already established in the Soviet Union.

Nevertheless, although Kirov did not lead the coherent resistance to Stalin and did not have ambitions to substitute Stalin as the General Secretary, it does not however mean that Stalin was not annoyed by his rising popularity. The documentation reveals that Kirov in fact was well-liked by within the Soviet leadership and the masses. Kirov could have been perceived by his fellow Party comrades as an alternative to Stalin due to his loyal position towards the general line of the Party throughout his political career.

The study of Kirov's political career on the basis of available archival documentation has not confirmed a theory that Kirov represented any reformist tendencies and, given his ideological views as well as his views on running political questions, no reason why he should have had one. On the contrary Kirov was one of the most faithful supporters of Stalin and his policies, Stalin's golden boy.

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<sup>358</sup> Åsmund Egge, *Kirov-Gåten*, 2009, 40.

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